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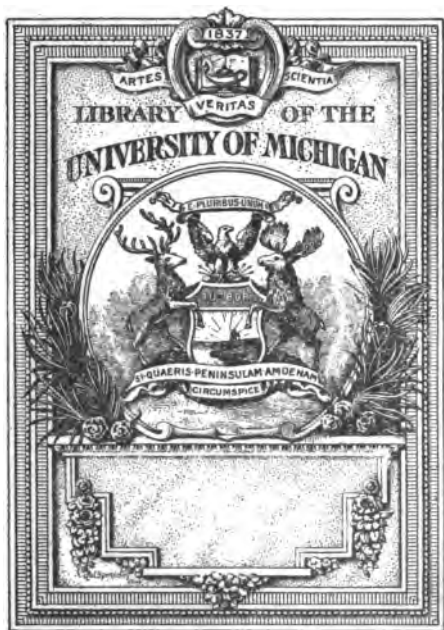
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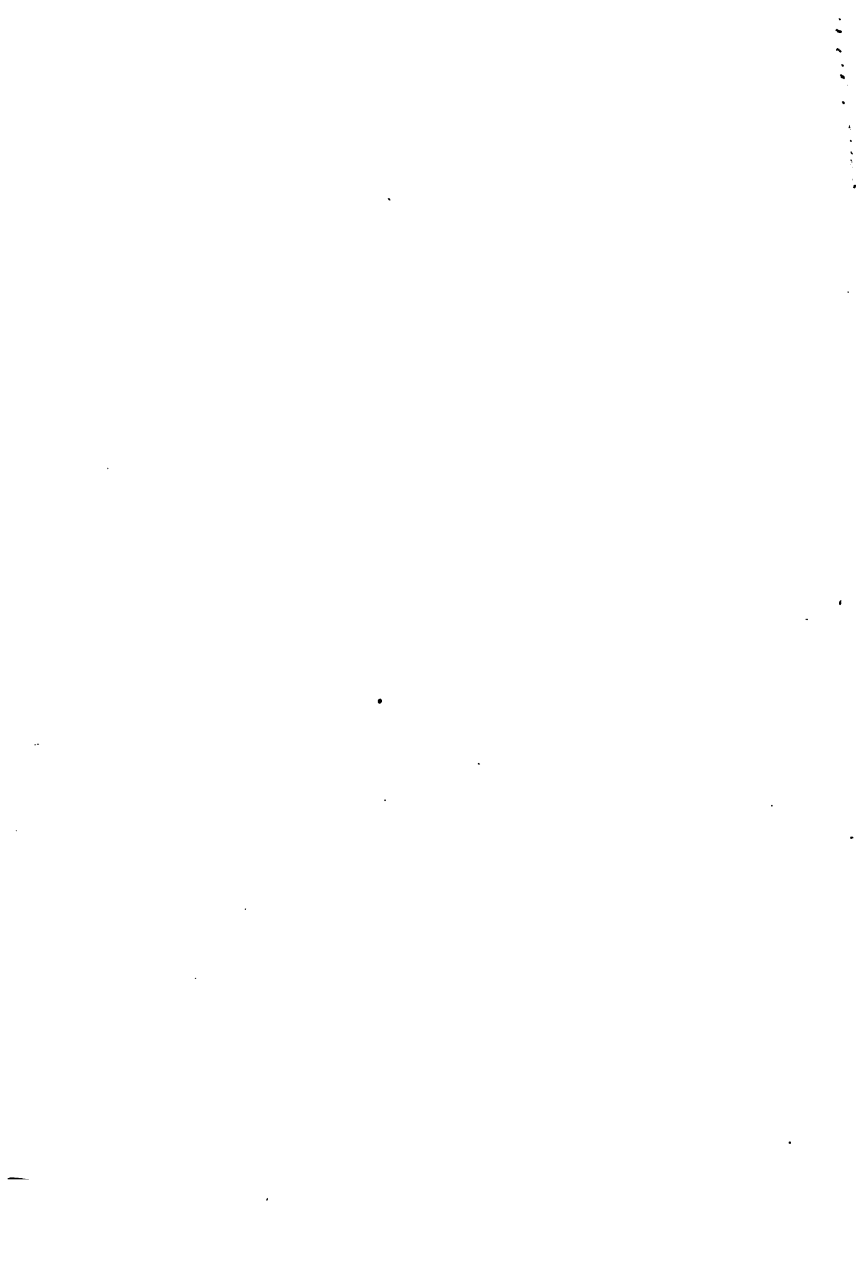
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IN THE DISTANCE.



IN THE DISTANCE

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A Nobel

BY

GEORGE PARSONS LATHROP

AUTHOR OF "AFTERGLOW," "A STUDY OF HAWTHORNE,"
"AN ECHO OF PASSION"



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IN THE DISTANCE.

I.

LOOKING TOWARDS A MOUNTAIN.

THE Cleft — a rugged gully breaking from the roadside, and tearing a long, descending seam in the wooded hill, about midway of the route from Willowbridge to Marle — was a silent place always. The hush that brooded over it seemed to be preparing the mind for events of importance. As if it were the primeval atmosphere, it was charged with a sense of profound beginnings.

Beginnings usually imply hope ; but about this place there was something sad, austere, and minatory. A new life, a new scheme, a new passion, even in the midst of its hopefulness, carries with it a shadow of coming struggle and the pathos of possible failure. It was this shadow, this pathos, which seemed to pervade the spot, in the full leafy vigor of the June day to which we now look back.

What gave to the Cleft its most suggestive quality, aiding the sense of something about to happen, was the glimpse one here commanded of Monadnoc moun-

tain, rising in New Hampshire, seventy miles to the northwestward, lonely, vast, and mute, as if it were the image of a dim futurity. Seventy miles away, — yet, like a lofty character not fully comprehended by those who are nearest, it asserted its integrity, sublime and intact when seen from the Cleft, though invisible at many places within easy approach.

In the universal stillness at this time, the day appeared to be resting. No houses were to be seen; the chirring of insects in the fields was barely noticeable, scattering itself like a mere seed of sound on the air. The birds had come to a long rest in their plain-song score; the very trees, in the pauses of the wind, had a hushed and hermit-like aspect. Monadnoc — a well marked but faint blue shape, making the light blue sky behind it look still paler, and seeming, in its mysterious power, almost to create the distance intervening on the hither side — took the place of action in the landscape. It impressed the mind like a deep strain of music; yet this impression only intensified the surrounding silence.

Throughout the wide scene, the only sign of stirring life was a pure white butterfly balancing himself on the yellow blossom of a hawkweed.

Suddenly the creak of a wheel was heard; then, for a few seconds, nothing more. The noise was soon repeated, together with other sounds implying that some vehicle was in motion along the ascent from Willowbridge. Voices came up from that direction, — a girl's laugh, with sundry heavier masculine notes dragging after it. The white butterfly winged a veer-

ing flight and left the hawkweed a-tremble ; at the same instant there started up from the grass-hung edge of the gully the figure of a young man, strong and slender. He appeared to meditate flight.

But again that faint, cheery sound of voices came floating up towards him, and changed his purpose. In such a solitude, the intrusion of human tones, though so pleasantly pitched, was almost ghost-like ; but the listener knew the voices : they were those of persons whom he had just been thinking about.

What inner meaning did you catch, Robert Burlen, in those few half-musical sounds? No strain of mournful destiny, no signal of antipathy, one would say ; for these were the persons you were almost wishing you might meet.

Whatever it was, something inclined the young man to get out of sight ; but it was too late to escape completely. The fall of the Cleft was too steep for him to go that way. Looking down the rounded surface of the road, he saw the ears of two horses rising above its upward slope towards him, and at this he made haste to get behind some black birches that fringed the fence beside the ragged cleft. The ears, with a jerk forward, were developed into heads, bringing into view behind them a section of dull-red roof belonging to a stage-coach. In like manner the driver was enlarged from a dingy bust of himself into a full-length figure, slightly doubled up as to his knees, from his position on the box ; and with him appeared three young people, — Miss Edith Archdale, daughter of the theological professor of that

name in the college at Marle ; Mr. Ravling, lawyer ; and Richard Whitcot, civil engineer.

Tired and struggling horses, a dusty old coach, and four figures on the top of it, — these need not, it should seem, strike the young man as fraught with any special importance or romantic potency. Yet it was a fact of some significance that he now saw those four individuals for the first time together, and three of them had just held a place in his revery. Looking out from his birch covert at the coach with its passengers, he was really confronting in these objects the elements of his future.

The wheels of the GENERAL SCOTT (so the coach was inscribed in large letters on its side) paused gratefully at the crest of the hill, close by a watering-trough on the inner side of the road.

“How good it is to see the mountain again!” cried Miss Archdale, with a spontaneity that made the three young men who heard her think it surprisingly well worth while to be in a position to inspect that venerable piece of geology.

Ravling and Whitcot turned their attention to Monadnoc with a readiness bordering on the obsequious. It might have been thought that each believed he could come to some private understanding with the mountain to favor himself and choke off the other, in any contemplated advances towards the young lady who had spoken.

The lawyer, whose pride it was to appear as little like a lawyer as possible (an endeavor in which he met with gratifying success), ruffled his short, dark,

outward-curving beard with one hand. "How much pleasure you will get out of it when you're up there this summer," he said rather moodily. "I wish I were going to get away, like the rest of you."

"You're really not going to take a vacation, then?" Whitcot inquired, with undue cheerfulness. The light-gray clothes which he affected gave him at any time an air of fresh expansiveness; but in making this inference he grew more than usually elastic.

Ravling continued to ruffle his beard, and made no answer. To soothe him, Miss Archdale delivered a few words of formal regret, which mortified him by their coldness. She went on presently with more freedom: "Are you sure, Mr. Ravling, that it's wise, even looking at it for self-interest, to slave so steadily at your profession? When you look at that mountain, far off as it is, you find the simple sight of it refreshing; don't you?" (Whitcot, though not appealed to, here tried another glance at Monadnoc; but, not finding it especially refreshing, gave it up again.) "So I should think," Edith went on to Ravling, "that for the good of your work —"

He interrupted, rather bitterly: "Don't appeal to my self-interest, at any rate, Miss Archdale. I'm well enough furnished with motives of that kind, don't you think? If you'd only try me," he went on, smiling oddly, "with some higher motive! See if I can't rise to it — at least part way."

It is to be hoped no one is going to sum up Ravling by this curt speech, for it hardly did him justice.

"What motive?" asked Edith, gayly. "What shall I try? It's terribly perplexing. But if you want a high one, Monadnoc itself I should think would do." For all this, she was displeased with him. Fearing, too, that she had gone too near suggesting a wish for his company during the summer, she withdrew her notice from him, and fixed it once more on that supreme mountain slope which closed in the vista. She longed to be close under it, at once: certainly not an unpleasant longing; yet she blamed Ravling for prompting it in her.

Meanwhile Marshall Stubbs, the driver, dismounting to water the horses, had thrown the reins to Whitcot. "Pretty hot day," observed that young gentleman, as if it did not much concern him, but might interest Stubbs. He then scowled parenthetically at Ravling.

"Starts the juice out some," admitted Stubbs, unchecking his lean but sweating steeds.

Whitcot smiled to himself, and scanned the old man to see if he also gave signs of "juice." He discovered none. The driver, with his hard red-and-tan face, was as dry and impermeable as his stage. It struck Whitcot that Stubbs would have looked upon perspiration as an unwarrantable extravagance. After another quick glance of disapproval at Ravling, he resumed: "Rather a lucky thing that you've got this trough at the top of such a hard hill."

"Ain't much luck about it," was the answer. "Why, *you* know young Burlen down at the college, don't you? It's his doing: *he* got it up." Stubbs

said this as if he were reciting a covert injury done to himself.

"Oh, yes: Burlen! So it was; I think I was told before. Thoughtful of him, though, was n't it? Idea was to have people stop, I suppose, where they could see this view."

"*Exactly* what I s'posed," said Stubbs, intimating by his tone that the thoughtful act had been an unworthy piece of hypocrisy. During the entire halt he carefully avoided looking off at the mountain. It was incumbent on him to show that one person at least could not be inveigled into admiring it.

Whitcot was reflecting with a certain satisfaction on Stubbs's obvious hostility to Burlen, when a discovery startled him. "Hullo!" he cried, with a harshness that may have been only the jarring of any sudden exclamation in a nook so calm. "There's Burlen himself! Is n't that you, Burlen? Come out and accept my apology if I'm mistaken."

Every one looked around towards the birches, and Burlen came forward with a smile: a little abashed at being found in hiding, so that his brown face colored up more than usual; but with a swift, honest light in his eyes, and a readiness of movement showing that he meant to make the best of it. A slight laugh escaped him. He had n't said a word, and yet they all felt that he had greeted them sufficiently.

"Well, you *might* have found an easier walk for such a hot day, Mr. Burlen," said Edith. "But I suppose you've found your reward." She made a

brief, light gesture towards the long valley and the far-off looming mountain.

"Yes, I've found my reward," Burlen answered, with a double meaning that roused the ire of the two young men on the coach. He smiled. It was not the smile of a saint or an ascetic, though it was by no means rollicking. A roguish glimmer stole over his strong, repressed lips and small chin, while his eyes pleaded for leniency if he had said anything too pointed. It is safe to assume that Edith forgave him.

"Lucky accident you should meet us — or we you," remarked Whitcot, without much ardor.

"Yes — yes." Burlen always spoke too quickly. He had to pause an instant. "The fact is, I walked this way unconsciously, and was sitting here thinking, when I — I heard you. Upon my word, it startled me so I tried to get out of the way. I don't know what made me." He looked at them all in child-like surprise at himself.

"I'm sorry you were n't with us ; we've had the most lovely drive !" said Edith, impulsively.

"You walked?" Ravling inquired, adding with legal adroitness : "Then of course you've got to go back all the way on foot. Well, I don't envy you !"

"Sorry there is n't room here," said Whitcot, following him up.

Miss Archdale flushed a little. Burlen was eying the coach, especially the top in her neighborhood.

Then there occurred a mysterious dispensation. Whitcot made no move to enlarge the available

space; a couple of mail-bags occupied the lower bench next to Stubbs, and Ravling contrived to be too abstracted to notice that anything was going on. But in spite of these facts a space silently, unaccountably opened between Edith and Ravling, and with an air of casual surprise she said: "If you really want to get on, Mr. Burlen, I'm sure we can make room."

The student of theology straightway reconciled faith with science, by climbing up and occupying the seat which to the eye of reason alone looked impossible; whereupon Whitcot, obedient to dynamic laws, had to slide down and arrange himself on the mail-bags.

"Is n't it wonderful?" said Edith, unconsciously; but she explained herself by continuing—"that Monadnoc should always impress me so strongly, many times as I've seen it? What do you suppose makes it?"

When Burlen was happy, a warm, generous light filled his tender, brown eyes, as if the spirit within him were trying to communicate its brightness to others. This was the case now, as he answered. "I find the same thing with myself," he said; "and so I was thinking of it a little while ago, here. I wonder if you remember that essay of Hazlitt's: at any rate, one sentence from it came into my mind. It's like this: 'Passion is lord of infinite space, and distant objects please because they border on its confines.' That's what he says. So a mountain on the horizon excites strong feeling and fancies that

like to go roaming through space. It seems to have got to the goal before them, and leads them on. Is n't there something in that?"

"Oh, yes!" cried the girl. "It's the truth itself. Such an insight as that is as beautiful as the thing that suggested it."

There was silence among them for an instant.

"I should prefer to have it stated more simply," said Whitcot, with an air of immense intellectual exertion.

"I agree with you, Miss Archdale," Ravling announced, "that it's a charming explanation. I'm not certain, though, that it suffices. But by the way, Burlen, I hope you're not going to fall into that modern trick of saying your best things in other men's words. It will play the deuce with your originality in the pulpit, you know. The popular preachers now-a-days are always calming their language down to a glassy level, and then they 'skip' a lot of nice rounded quotations over the surface, to make a splash; but however amusing it may be, it is n't dignified, you know."

Burlen looked serious, apparently willing to admit that he might fall into error. But before he had said anything, Stubbs, who had been prowling along the edge of the gully, came back declaring in a loud voice: "Guess shall have to talk to County Commissioners a mite 'bout this hole. 'Tain't hardly safe. There'd ought to be a stone wall right along and some trees planted un'neath, to hold the soil. Guess *that* 'd spoil the show; hey?" He addressed

himself with gloomy playfulness to Burlen, as the one most likely to suffer — and deservedly — from any injury to the view.

Then with a leap he took his seat and the reins. The GENERAL SCOTT creaked, rattled, and started on its way. In a moment or two it was on the descent to Marle. A departing whip-crack resounded; the noise of hoofs grew more distant; then a light dust-cloud raised by the coach drifted away, and stillness settled upon the hill again. The elements of Burlen's future had met him, taken him up and borne him along; leaving the silence and mystery of the Cleft to germinate new episodes.

II.

THREE LOVERS.

THE ride to Willowbridge had at first been contemplated by Edith alone.

A friend of hers, Miss Viola Welsted, of Boston, had arrived at the village of the willows by a route which did not take her through Marle; and as Edith was going away in a few days to spend the vacation near Monadnoc, the two girls were overpowered by a whirlwind of eagerness to see each other. They had n't anything very particular to impart; but women weigh their mutual relations with such sentimental scrupulousness — leaving only a small residuum of feeling in regard to the pangs they may inflict in their relations with men — that the obligation upon these two to effect a meeting appeared to be a sacred one.

The young men, by attaching themselves to this solemn mission, instantly gave it a worldly, frivolous, and amatory turn.

Ravling had come from Boston to look up the title to some lands near Marle, as he explained; an errand which required an astonishingly protracted stay, without in the least preventing him from seeing a good deal of Edith. So, when he heard she was going over to Willowbridge, he remembered that he

ought to inquire about rooms there for his aunt, — “Mrs. Withers, you know,” he specified. “I expect her to leave me most of her money, and that makes me very attentive.”

In saying this he gratified an eccentric fondness for underrating his own motives, familiar to his friends.

“I wonder, then,” said Edith, taking up the bitter jest, “that she dares to let you choose a place for her to live in.”

“It is surprising,” Ravling answered, with pretended satisfaction. “But then, it’s only for a few weeks. And she puts more confidence in me than you do, I’m afraid.”

Composure was a strong characteristic in Miss Archdale, but it failed her a little as she replied: “*You* have no reason to say that of me.” Which referred to the fact that, having once rejected the lawyer as a lover, she had retained him as a friend. “But there is a better reason for your going to Willowbridge,” she resumed. “You know Viola Welsted, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes.” Ravling wrinkled his forehead.

“Of course. I remember she has often spoken of you.”

The young man’s interest increased. “Has she ever said any good of me?” he laughingly asked.

“As to that I don’t think I could say positively.” Edith laughed, too, smoothing her dress absently with her hand and looking away. “But I certainly got the idea that you were on good terms, — unusually good.”

"Perhaps you think I have a hungry vanity," he began more seriously. "That is n't it, but I'm tormented by a fear. I don't know how to express it. Yes I do, though. I wonder sometimes whether I'm entirely selfish. That's the fear I mean. But then it seems to me there's a kind of selfishness in people with professedly great aims, too." It was tolerably clear to Edith that he had Burlen in mind. "They take or reject what they want, no matter what the cost may be to others; yet they're not blamed for it. Now I don't know that I have any *great* aim in the world that would pass for such; but I'm trying to do my best. There appears to be a place for me, and I want to fill it to the best advantage. For that I need a number of things, — knowledge, friends, a quantity of money; in fact all the things that give power. Because I bend my energies to getting these, people think me selfish; and it's natural enough that I should have got to thinking myself so in consequence."

It was unusual for him to speak so much at length about himself. Edith's carelessly distant manner gave place to a more earnest one as she listened. Her chin sank a trifle, bringing her face forward in a level, concentrated gaze. "Those people with great aims that you speak of," she asked — "does n't it make all the difference that they *have* a high purpose?"

"Perhaps," he assented slowly. "Yet it's hard to say why the same desire on the part of two conscientious people can be selfish in one and unselfish in the other."

"What desire?" she was surprised into demanding.

Ravling waited. Then, "It might be hard," said he, "to find a suitable example." They were both aware, however, that the desire he referred to was that which Burlen and himself were supposed to share, — of winning Edith. She drew back; — a scarcely perceptible change of attitude, but it immediately put a barrier between them. "But suppose," Ravling continued, "that one is born without the capacity for grand purposes?"

"I wonder if that's possible," she mused. They were already beginning to speak more to themselves than to one another. "Well, if one were like that — ah, here is Mr. Burlen!"

The lawyer rose and shook hands with the student as he entered. He remained standing, with an indeterminate annoyance in his manner, and holding his hat.

It turned out that Burlen could not go with them, as had been proposed, to Willowbridge. He was obliged to give the day to finishing and memorizing the address which he was to deliver on graduating.

"What's your subject?" inquired Ravling, with a fatigued assumption of politeness.

"Enthusiasm," answered Burlen, very gravely; and then he directed a glance at Edith, as if to find out how she took the announcement.

"A broad field," murmured the other man, abstractedly, as he gazed out into the village street, through the windows. He was saying to himself,

"This fellow's like all undergraduates. He thinks it in the last degree important."

"That's good!" exclaimed Edith. "You'll have to put a great deal of that quality into the essay; but then it's natural to you, is n't it?"

"I don't know," said Burlen. "Am I an enthusiast?"

"Yes; I think you are."

"At any rate I'm not cynical," he affirmed, looking at the lawyer. Possibly there was some antagonism in his look. "I believe in the possibility of accomplishing good aims."

"You're young, too," Ravling vouchsafed equivocally.

"Yes, and I hope to remain so," was the retort.

Suspecting that he had given offence, Ravling took his leave, and Burlen likewise went away a moment after.

As for Whitcot, his duties were at no time very rigorous. Nominally he was a civil engineer, a profession which, in its earliest stages, has often been noticed to consist in travelling promiscuously, taking long and agreeable vacations, eating heartily, wearing the handiwork of fashionable tailors, smoking expensive cigars, and doing the civil — while some one else does the engineering. It was, therefore, directly in the line of his work to take a box-seat on the GENERAL SCOTT at the same time that Edith did so.

Burlen might without much difficulty have neglected the work of which he had made an excuse;

but it struck him that the other two had already overdone matters a little, and he preferred not to put himself in the same position. When they were gone, he went to his barren-looking room in the dormitory, glanced over his manuscript correctively, and began drilling himself in recitation and appropriate gestures. But the picture of Edith absent with Ravling and Whitcot kept coming between him and his imaginary audience. It annoyed him to think that he had so easily given his rivals an advantage, by keeping in the background. "Bah! what rubbish this is!" he exclaimed, breaking off in the midst of a flowery sentence. "Why should I make a regulation puppet of myself?"

He walked swiftly across the room, seized the manuscript from the table, tore some of the sheets in two, and flung the whole roll into a corner.

The flutter of the outraged sermon-paper as it fell had scarcely ceased, before he brought himself up sharply with disgust at his slight irascibility.

"This is ungoverned anger," he said to himself in a cold tone, and with a severity which would have surprised any one hearing him. Leaving the room, he went on that long walk which ended by bringing him to the Cleft; and there he meditated until roused by the returning coach.

While he sat musing, Whitcot and Ravling had had him in their thoughts. After leaving Edith at Miss Welsted's lodging door, they had started on a stroll together through the Willowbridge woods.

"Does n't it strike you as rather a queer plan,"

asked the engineer, "young Burlen going up to Savage's Mills to board at the same place with Miss Archdale and her aunt, this summer?"

"Probably I should n't think so if I were Burlen."

"Oh! I see you're not quite so much interested in that quarter as I thought."

"Are you sure?" interposed Ravling.

"You certainly intimate," Whitcot returned, "that it's all one to you whether this preacher-boy — or boy-preacher — is near her or not."

"Not at all. I simply think he has a right to go where he pleases; and as they have n't any minister settled over one of their churches up there, it's proper enough that he should go and be sampled."

"But he need n't be at the same house with Miss Archdale," objected the other. "It is n't a fair thing."

"One would suppose," said Ravling, smiling under his glossy beard, "that you were the selfish one, instead of me. I'm willing to give Burlen all the chances he can get. I should want them all if I were in his place. But as to fairness, you know no one could start on equal terms with him. He has been constantly near Miss Archdale for three years, and is a special favorite with her father."

"Why he should be is more than I can fathom," said Whitcot, pettishly. "He's a man of no origin. Half the people in Marle are afraid to have much to do with him, because they suspect something discreditable in his life."

"There's a deep shadow of some kind on him, I know," Ravling confessed. "That is n't for me to

explain. But Archdale is a theoretical old gentleman. I think he's taken Burlen under his protection from a sense of duty, just because the boy has no other friends."

"Boy! I wish he were," muttered the young man in the gray suit. "I insist it's unreasonable that a girl like that should be thrown with him, at the risk of entangling herself."

Ravling turned on him with exasperation. "Miss Archdale," he said — "if we are speaking of her — may be trusted to meet the requirements of the situation. And my opinion is that she would be as happy if she chose to marry a young country parson — well, perhaps not so happy, but certainly as dignified — as if she were to take a brilliant place in society, for which she's also fitted."

It was unusual that two young men devoted to the same woman should stand there discussing the fact indirectly, by talking over their common rival. But people are in the habit of doing unusual things. Having now got enough of it, they went back to find Edith.

She, meanwhile, had been deeply absorbed.

"Dear, dear Viola!"

"Edith, it's an age since I've seen you."

This was the not unusual opening of the talk between the two girls.

"My dear, I want you to come over to Marle."

"Impossible, Edith."

"But we're to have a Commencement party. Dick Whitcot, my old schoolfellow, has got back

from Germany, and you must see him. Besides, Mr. Ravling's going to be there."

"Ravling? Good gracious! he's *everywhere*, — positively everywhere!"

"Are you tired of him?" Edith asked. "I don't believe he's tired of you." She took hold of Viola's necklace and began to examine it minutely.

"Don't chatter," said Miss Viola, airily. "How can you possibly know whether he's tired of me or not?"

"I don't," said her friend.

Then they unexpectedly kissed each other, as if some disclosure of great and tender importance had passed between them. "I don't care," asserted Miss Viola somewhat vaguely: "you're perfectly charming."

"And can't you really come to the party?" Edith inquired again, after a pause. "My aunt wants you to."

"Do give my love to Mrs. Savland," was the answer. "No, I don't believe I possibly can. I have some reading to do: I'm deep in my German."

"Are you writing anything?"

"I can't tell you a word about it at present," Miss Viola answered, with mystery. She was not an authoress, but it was supposed by her friends, as it is of so many Boston girls, that she might become one. They were anxious to be apprised of it at the earliest moment, — possibly for fear that it would otherwise never be known. She had the customary appurtenance of a father and mother; but they knew

their place, and allowed her to go away in summer to where she could find solitude and receive the influences of Nature.

When the young men returned, and the final paroxysm of parting was in progress: "I shall see you Thursday, then," said Viola. Thursday was the day fixed for the party.

"Yes, dear; I'm so glad you're coming," said Edith, accepting the decision instantly as if it had been made for hours. "You'll stay all night with us, of course."

Somehow, she herself during the whole conversation had n't once mentioned Burlen.

It was almost a part of the curriculum at Marle for undergraduates to entertain a more or less hopeless passion for Archdale's daughter. Hence it was not surprising that she should be serenely aware of the admiration which Burlen and Whitcot felt for her. Ravling, though she had met him for the first time during her visit in Boston the previous winter, had already committed himself. Nevertheless, the situation annoyed her at times. She never took her aunt, Mrs. Savland, into her confidence, and being motherless had no one else to consult. As yet, however, she was not considering possibilities of choice between her three lovers. Like all young people she saw her life far off, in advance, notwithstanding the intensity of every present feeling; but whatever her future was to be, she felt that it would be something firm and unalterable, — dim with distance now, like *Monadnoc*, but as solid when she

should reach it as the mountain itself. Therefore she was in no haste to fix it irrevocably.

Whitcot, who had always lived in Marle and had been to school with her, had a kind of local advantage in her mind. He was not in himself a novelty, but it was a novelty to find the boy who had lately teased her grown into a man, returning from foreign studies in garments of a dimly remote origin, with a new blond mustache waving boldly above his lips and an insidious attachment for her in his heart. Ravling, on the other hand, was not familiar; and a development of devotion in his quarter, so opposite to that of Whitcot, was so unexpected that it pressed its way gently into her moods of absent half-thoughts, unwilling though she was to figure as a possible thwarter of poor Viola's sentiment for him. Burlen's hold upon her fancy came from a blending of the near and the distant. His presence was an accustomed thing, from his having been three years in the college; yet he was a stranger, too. She knew less of his history than she did of Ravling's. But it was an interesting point about him that, although he was an undergraduate, she had noticed him.

None of the three felt any confidence as to his chances, excepting Whitcot. He was pleased at finding himself enslaved to Edith, whom he had known so long. He fancied it a stroke of originality on his part, which must prove as delightful to her as it was to him. When Burlen mounted the stage-coach at the Cleft, he was momentarily eclipsed; but a glance at the mirror as he was going to bed

reassured him. "It's a pity Burlen is so brown and solemn," he remarked aloud, after getting this view of himself. "And then," — with a touch of commiseration, — "breeding and associations must tell, in the end. The man is too much of an enigma socially."

The consoling power of these reflections was so great, that Whitcot permitted himself one more cigarette before winding up the experiences of the day. The cigarette burned briskly, and it seemed to him that his heart, enkindled by a fond passion, was almost if not quite as glowing and fragrant as the lighted end of this small roll at his lips.

III.

“ENTHUSIASM.”

COMING back to his mutilated manuscript, Burren gave only one glance at its torn and crumpled pages, and then tossed it into a drawer. After that he devoted the remaining time to going over the subject in thought, recalling the best of what he had written, trying to go deeper, to strike out more directly, and to get rid of the conscious graces of oratory which he had planned.

When at last the crucial moment came, and he emerged upon the platform to face a subdued flutter of fans and dresses and many rows of heads planted in the pews of the old chapel, his address met with applause and a surprised appreciation. He had resolved to put forth a strength which should convince his hearers as well as himself. The blow rang. The frigid walls echoed his emphatic tones with a startled sound; his class listened to him in surprise; Archdale's lucid spectacles were fixed upon him with a brightness that seemed to signalize his intent approval; and the main body of fluttering listeners found that it had got something to flutter about in earnest.

He began with combating Locke's declaration that enthusiasm is no divine inspiration, but merely the

result of overheated imagination; following with examples from the lives of heroes and martyrs, and an argument on their results to show that under the flames of imagination there had been a solid and exhaustless substance of more than ordinary reason, — a persistent inspiration which was true enthusiasm. This quality had been confused with mere fanaticism in books, and he tried to point out in his own way how the two things should be distinguished. He dwelt much on the nobility of self-denial and self-sacrifice for conviction's sake; the special need of them, too, at the present day in easy-going, success-loving America. Near the end he drew a picture of the drilling of a tunnel through a mountain, to illustrate the union of a calm endurance with enthusiasm. "Inspiration," he said, "may constantly be providing the instant, explosive power essential to the work; but unless the heading is in order, and the cold, steely points of the drill are in place, the work will never advance.

"The persistence, the cold mechanism," he went on, — "where shall we find it? That is the task of a lifetime, to which we must never, during a single waking moment, cease to address ourselves. But the inspiration," — here his voice became a soft, fluid fire, and he gazed out over the people with a commanding sympathy that swept them all into one current, — "oh, believe that it is in you, in me!" Involuntarily his hands went with a quick gesture to his breast, and fell again. "Believe that a new force goes out into the world from us, to-day, which

is not 'our own, yet for which we are responsible. *This is enthusiasm!* ”

It was not a performance that he had set before them, but a fact; a fresh utterance from a fresh heart. He scarcely knew when he had ended. The ceasing of his voice startled his hearers even more than its resonance had done; and when all was over, forgetting to make a conventional bow, he bent his head for an instant with an effect of mingled benediction on those who sat below him and prayer to some higher power. As he withdrew to his place he seemed to pass back into his ordinary self, for the first time since beginning to speak. If there had been an atom of self-consciousness in what he had said and done, the whole might perhaps have crumbled; but there had not been, and it stood.

“He is a born orator!” people murmured. “What a wonderful *effort!*” said they, of a thing which was remarkable by its absence of effort. But the phrase was meant for high tribute.

In one hour he had dissolved the cloud of prejudice which had hung over him for three years. At the party for the graduates, that evening, in Archdale's capacious gambrel-roofed house and old-fashioned garden, to which Whitcot and Ravling and many townsfolk came, he was in great demand. He looked a little awkward, however, in his frock coat and white tie, and showed a tendency to get into the background; not being fully aware of his triumph. Still throbbing with the desire which had been on him to say something true, and feeling that the time

for saying it had gone, he even felt some depression.

But he was happy in looking at Edith among the busy talkers, and watching the smiles and passing lights on her face. Blooming at the surface of her two-and-twenty years, she was like some miraculous water-flower that rested on the pausing tide of time in solitary perfection. Everywhere she went, she carried with her, like Milton's Eve, a pomp of winning grace. Her largely moulded arms were bare, and from a soft turbulence of white lawn her calm, full throat emerged with an effect of girlish stateliness. From one shoulder a chain of airily wrought flowers trailed, curving with a novel grace far down on the front of her dress, so unobtrusive and so cleverly arranged that they seemed to be clinging there simply by aid of her motion as she walked.

She was a very different sort of person from her father and Mrs. Savland. From her mother she had inherited a more opulent nature than theirs, and it showed in all the details of her sumptuous beauty. Her eyebrows were very dark and almost straight, though their delicate arch prevented any undue flatness; and her under-lip was so full as to curl perceptibly as if from pure abundance of natural power. Underneath her eyes was a soft line of shading, and the lids—except when she looked directly into another face—concealed perhaps half the eye. This gave her a certain unaffected queenliness which design could hardly have bestowed. The softly curling lip and the coolness which reigned over her beauty

were sometimes taken to indicate cynicism. If they did, a surrounding of susceptible undergraduates might have accounted for it. Besides, during the winter she had been in Boston, seeing people whose riches were greater than themselves, and going about in a self-appreciating circle where, by contrast, she had been forced to discover some of her own strength.

Burlen, at all events, had no fear of its being a real cynicism that evening. He was standing on one side of a doorway when from the other he heard Ravling's voice, measured and urbane, discussing with a thoughtful young lady (who believed she was making an impression on him) — it was Miss Viola Welsted, by the way — the discourse of the morning. "That closing simile about the drill and so on," said the lawyer, "was good. Yes, as things go, the whole production was very fair. But there was one point he failed to bring out; which is, that enthusiasts are perpetually mistaking for divine motives and general principles what are really abnormal schemes suggested by their own personal whims or misfortunes. I should say he would have to look out not to fall into that error himself."

The graduate flushed as he listened, conceiving a sudden contempt for this man, his opponent in love, who appeared to be adroitly disparaging him behind his back. But at that instant he saw Edith making a slight imperative gesture for him to cross the room to her. Ravling's remark fled from his mind, and he made haste to obey; passing by Archdale, who

was talking gravely with a bony-cheeked graduate about “speculative neologists” and “rationalizing sceptics.”

“Why have n’t you been near me before?” asked Edith, with the most generous flattery a young woman can give to the man who, she knows, is already consumed with delight at being in the same room with her. “I have n’t had a single chance to tell you how much I liked your oration — or whatever we ought to call it. Is oration a large enough word?”

“Too large,” said Burlen. “Take the first letter alone: that describes it.”

“A naught? No, no! You sha’n’t speak of it that way. What you said was a great help to me. It set me thinking so, gave me such ideas.”

The young man’s sombre face broke into a radiance delightful to see. “I could hardly have believed that possible,” he murmured.

“But you would have been sure of your power if you had ever talked to me before in anything like that strain. Oh, dear!” she continued with unconcealed but not very contrite humility, “it makes me so ashamed to think what you’ve been learning all the time you’ve been here, while I’ve made so little progress!”

“You!” he exclaimed, in astonishment. Then with an air of trouble he added: “I’ve never been able to say much of what I felt before. There’s been a weight on me all these years. And then to you, especially —”

“Did you think me so *especially* unable to under-

stand?" she broke in, her pretty cynicism gathering force. "I'm even worse than I thought, then."

"It isn't that." Burlen blushed. "But I had a horror of forcing my profession on any one in conversation."

"After your oration to-day," said Edith frankly, with a smile, "I don't feel it to be your *profession* that you speak seriously on a great subject. It's simply yourself."

How could he reply to this? It was clear that she spoke without flattery, and to thank her for what she said would be vanity, compared with her innocent candor. He looked at her earnestly, with lips slightly apart, like a person who listens for the repetition of a sound he is not quite sure of; then his eyes fell. "You encourage me," he said, in a deep voice.

It is singular that in this world people can hardly utter a direct truth, even the kindest, without immediately feeling something like shame for it. Are we so accustomed to evasions that the soul recoils before its own honesty, when occasionally revealed, as if it were disgraceful? Whatever the reason, these two succumbed to the usual embarrassment, after their brief exchange of cordial sincerity.

"I must n't keep you here," said Edith vivaciously, in a moment. "I only wanted to thank you for your — your sermon; and there are some friends waiting, who want me to present you. Come."

As they went together Burlen asked if he might take her in to supper, afterward. She assented, and

then he was formally made known to a pair of elderly ladies, old connoisseurs in youthful preachers, who basked most embarrassingly in the transient splendor of his success.

Whitcot passed three hours of fierce discomfort at the party, and when supper came he nobly persevered in a savage resolution he had made not to eat anything, — not even an ice-cream. Stung by the progress Burlen seemed to be making with Edith, he projected a still more terrible step. Mrs. Savland had asked him to take the same train with them to Savage’s, and of course he had entered warmly into the plan. But he now determined to inflict on Edith the blow of going thither by another route. He was jealous, and she might as well know it.

When he took his leave, he said, “I find I must bid you good-by for several days, unless I should see you before we get to Savage’s.”

She looked surprised. “Are you prevented from going up with us?”

“I shall go — I have *decided* to go,” he said, attempting to throw a grieved meaning into his manner “— by the other route.”

“I dare say you’ll find that better,” she returned calmly, with no appearance of regret. “Good-by, then.”

Half an hour later, Whitcot would have given any moderate fortune, not his own, to resume the arrangement he had just broken.

Ravling went to the little house where he was to room for the night, full of an excitement that

hovered around him and penetrated him like the searching and exquisite scent of the grape-blossoms in Dr. Archdale's garden, which he had just been inhaling. Sedate as he was, he could not evade the influence of the party, with its bright lights, its pretty-faced girls in fresh dresses, the hum of talk and light spurts of laughter, the sight of groups and couples straying in and out of the house and about the roomy lawn and garden full of delicious latter-June perfumes. The young girls, and the little men in black coats and white ties just turned out of the theological mould prepared to adjust the destinies of these or other damsels, had all been stirred by visions of coming possibilities. There was an aroma of anticipation about the whole company. "Why shouldn't I have my fresh young hopes as well?" Ravling queried. He said to himself that the fact of having been refused once ought not to discourage him permanently; in fact, his two competitors had not even got as far as that.

But, remembering Burlen's ascendancy during the whole day, he felt that he must make a move on his own behalf before Edith took her departure.

IV.

EDITH'S BLUE-ROOM.

MEN do not commonly make their surroundings respond sympathetically to their own character. When they try it, the result as a rule is fragmentary and without permanence. But a woman's nature will often melt into her dwelling-place, coloring it and becoming part of it.

I am thinking chiefly not of the general proposition, but of Edith Archdale in particular. It was so with her. The room which saw most of her, and therefore told most of her, was her own "blue-room" in the upper story of Archdale's house, where the gambrel — bending like a woman's finger about to measure cloth — vaulted in a cosey apartment, with four dormer windows looking on the evergreens in front and part of the garden on the side.

To enter here was to breathe a clearer air and to encounter a fresh serenity. On the sill of one of the windows bloomed a miniature parterre of flowers in a flat tiled box, breaking the vividness of the outdoor glare, as it passed in among the pale-blue and straw tints, the lavender and harmonious brown of the interior. There were lambrequins of muslin plaited on the edge with blue, and lined with it; dotted and plaited muslin, again worked with blue

silk and bordered with trembling lace, covered the maiden pillow on the small, neat bed. And so the spots of robin's-egg color and pearl were carried from point to point about the room, often in articles that bore trace of the sweet girl's own patiently obscure handiwork. The jewel-case on the toilet-table had blue satin in it which her fingers had fitted there. Mats which she had crocheted and trimmed in keeping with everything else lay about in the proper places. On a small writing-table near another dormer was a feathered pen which she had painted, and opposite that stood a screen on which passing fancies of birds and tall, waving grasses and a gaunt, white moon had been impressed by her brush. But there was not much in the room of this purely æsthetic nature; and the needle-work, though showing originality and graceful judgment, was of the nameless domestic school our mothers and grandmothers formed.

"I like the Kensington work, too, and Japanese things," Edith would say; "but true art is free, and means fine enjoyment in many different ways. So why should I be tied down to one way, like my Boston friends?" (Miss Viola, for example, was always grieved into silence by any ornamentation which did not conform to the canons of the Embroidery School.)

The large glass in an old-time twisted frame, tipped saucily back on the toilet-table, took in these objects and many others, grouping them all effectively, — the soft hush of the meek window-hangings, the curve of a graceful cup on a bracket, and the broken

shadow of pictures in dull-wood frames. A tall Venetian vase of opalescent glass, with a leaf-twined stem, stood near it, tremulous with as many smothered gleams of color as there were waves of emotion in Edith's heart every day. Was there powder in the powder-box? I fear there was, and that Edith was not above using a little, sometimes. As to the perfume bottles — but we must not pry too curiously. I suspect if they contained anything, it must have been the fragrance of maidenly innocence itself.

It was in this room that Edith sat, the afternoon after the party, working with blue tambo-cotton, in satin-stitch, a pretty initial on a small linen bag. As she worked, she smiled. She was thinking of Whitcot and his farewell. She knew he had taken offence, but it was impossible to think of it seriously. Even now he hovered before her recollection as a man with a smiling face. She always thought of him in that way. Whitcot was too light a weight to play tragedy in real life, unless the tragedy all came from other persons. He was interesting while he remained volatile and active, but repose and gloom neutralized him. We all of us, however, assume parts and yield to moods without much reflection as to whether our complexions and temperaments fit us for them; and so this mistaken youth was continually taking a line of action very disadvantageous to him.

She could n't think long about one of her admirers without including glimpses of the other two. They obtruded themselves on the field of mental vision like friends who by mistake may have got within range

of a camera intended to photograph only one sitter. They appeared in fragments; they were out of proportion, and would have been horribly disconcerted if they had known that they were being looked at in this manner; but such, my dear young men who insist on getting in the way of the female camera, is the fate in store for all of you! Burlen had beyond doubt gained much in her appreciation during the last twenty-four hours. She had never looked up to him before: she did now. Edith was a girl to whom this kind of change appealed. She had never looked up to any man near her own age, until now. Yet Ravling came close after Burlen, at least, in commanding this regard. There was a fitness about him which she had never seen in any one else. His manner corresponded exactly to himself and his mode of thought. He never, like Whitcot, tried to be something which he could n't be, and perhaps he was rather less fitful than Burlen.

So she went on making dissolving-views of these several young men, while her needle twinkled through the linen and left its little azure trail there; until Mrs. Savland appeared at the threshold and told her that Ravling was below, wishing to see her.

"I'm going back to Boston to-night," said he, when she came into the long sitting-room, attired in a sandy-tinted dress belted with blue, and looking very bright and composed. "It's such a lovely afternoon that I thought you might possibly be inclined for a walk."

If he had seemed more eager, she might not have

gone ; but here his self-possession, so effective with her, stood him in good stead. "Will you wait," she asked, "till I get on my hat?"

The hat was an unpretentious covering of straw, trimmed simply with a blue that matched her belt. But as they went down through the garden and into the fields, the lawyer was smitten with wonder at finding that a dress of sandy-colored thin cloth, and a pale straw-hat, could become such captivating objects.

"Shall we get some water-lilies, at the lake?" asked the wearer of the blue belt. "Or what shall we do?"

"Whatever you like," said he. "My notion was to go along the hill just above the lake and into that hollow where you said the blue gentians grow."

"Yes, that's a nice walk," she agreed. "But you know we don't get gentians till autumn."

"Don't you? I suppose not." It did n't seem to be a crushing disappointment to him.

"I know where moccasin-flowers grow, too," said she. "But for them it may not be early enough. They come and go in a breath."

"Then I'm both too early and too late," he rejoined. "Never mind: we shall have the walk."

"And no water-lilies?"

"Why should I consent to take them, when I wanted gentians," he laughed. "I'm set upon getting what I wanted, or nothing."

He had n't meant to lead up to the subject of his suit by this remark ; but its appositeness struck them both, and Edith blushed.

"That, or nothing?" she asked, hastily. "Then the poor water-lilies must be resigned, I suppose. But, honestly, don't you think you're too haughty? — No, I won't tell you any more of your faults; I'm afraid it embitters you."

"I should be glad to take your criticisms less seriously," said he; which was true, but flattered her as much as if it had been an invention.

They moved in silence along a narrow path which began unaccountably in the midst of the grass-field and stole up a slope among the pines. There they saw the white, creeping glimmer of the lake just to the north. In a thicker copse beyond the piny hill vireos were singing swiftly, but just around them the wood was very still. A moment before, they had been in sight of the clustered roofs, the spires and belfry of Marle, its tall shade-trees and cultivated fields; but, by a transition peculiar to American scenery, a few steps seemed to have carried them out of the reach of civilization. Here Ravling laid down a light shawl for Edith. "Let's sit a moment where we can see the lake," he proposed.

"There's a boat on it," said Edith, taking the place. It was discernible at the other end of the pond, skimming over the water like a huge white butterfly.

"How restless it looks," observed Ravling, idly. "It's really absurd! Judging from the motion, I should say that whoever's in that boat must be in a disturbed state of mind. But I dare say he's perfectly comfortable. Appearances deceive." They

both listened to the wind sighing louder and fainter in the pines above them. "That's the way with people," he continued. "There are others who look perfectly comfortable and are very uneasy. — I've half resolved to run up to Savage's, Miss Archdale, some time while you're all there."

"I think Miss Welsted may come, too," she suggested.

"Do you put that forward as an inducement?"

"Not as an obstacle, certainly."

"There are other inducements that would be still more powerful," he returned. "If I could only know that you would think again of what I once asked you, and think in such a way as to give me hope."

Edith kept her eyes on the darting boat, without at once replying. "Do you think it's quite fair," she asked, finally, "to bring that up again, after my trusting so completely in your silence?"

"I can only throw myself on your mercy," he answered, strenuously. "A woman's mercy is more to be trusted than a man's silence. — We were speaking the other day about great aims. Is n't my aim great enough?"

He paused, and she glanced up to ask, "What aim?" — as she had recently asked, "What desire?" But the burning earnest in his eyes made the question impossible. The conventional man had disappeared: it was a whole-souled devout ardor that faced her, in his guise. "I've put the problem to myself in many ways," he went on, "but I cannot leave you out

of it, try as I may. *You* are my aim, Miss Archdale. I can find no higher one. I know I seem cold and self-centred enough; but if I have n't the power to lose myself in any other hope or ambition than the one you have roused in me, is it my fault? Selfish or not, I must declare to you this, — that my life is empty and uninviting without you. It leads nowhere. Am I never to hope that it can receive its purpose from you?"

When the last word had escaped him, the wind that was ruffling the lake struck more vehemently up into the trees, and filled the wood with a gradual, bewildering roar. The wind beat into Edith's face, too; and as she sat there amid the breezy tumult, with the sense of waving boughs and unsteady sunlight around her, and Ravling standing fixed and determined in the commotion, there was an illusion in her mind of Nature's having taken part with him against her. To her amazement she felt a momentary impulse to yield; at least to give him a distant hope.

"Can it be that I am really so necessary in your thoughts?" she asked, without meeting his gaze.

"I have told you how necessary," he returned steadily. "I dreaded to speak of it again. I had hardly made up my mind to, when we came out. But I want something to hold by, something to work for: can't you tell me that you will think of it this summer?"

"It would be wrong," she said; "for then you would expect more. Oh, *why* have you brought this

up again?" She had risen, and was walking towards the lake slowly, but turned with an appealing look.

"Because I have no art, but only a consuming need."

The words made her wonder if she knew what she was doing in so persistently refusing Ravling's devotion. How strange that when so much power of expression is given to human eyes and speech, so much significance to the shaping of a hand, the heart should often be so dumb and uncertain! But the image of Viola suddenly presented itself to her, and decided her.

"Please don't say anything more," she said, abruptly. "Perhaps instead of too little purpose you have too much: you want your own will to prevail over everything."

"Ah, I see," he retorted, "you don't really comprehend my feeling. You are still living in the future. I am older, and have begun to live in the present. Soon I shall have only the past left to live in. Well, with your advantage, you can afford to be chilling."

"I'm not chilling!" she cried, with a flash of inconsistent displeasure. "But if you think me so, why do you insist upon wanting my love?"

"From the fascination that anything unattainable has, perhaps."

"Are we to reproach everything that's unattainable, then? That's unreasonable. Suppose that some one were attached to you, — some girl you did n't care for. We can imagine such a thing, can't we?" The shadow of scorn in her lower lip here

became a little more distinct. He was vaguely conscious that she might be referring to Viola. She continued: "You would seem to her far-off and unfeeling; and yet perhaps it might not be your fault."

"I only know," he said, despairingly, "that you are the highest and best in my life."

It was not strange that when the pungent spice of the pines and the triple downward trill of the vireos, floating in with the sandal-wood color of the sunlight which divided the round shadows of the boughs, gave her pleasure, these words should also thrill her. But she only said: "That's another fact about the unattainable — it is easy to exaggerate it. Whatever you feel about me, Mr. Ravling, keep it intact. It's all that I'm able to give you; and if we discuss it any more, you'll be sure to lose even that."

They had been so preoccupied that they did not notice until now how the restless sail had borne down towards the point where they stood, a few feet above the water. By this time it was so close that they could recognize the occupant. It was Whitcot. He had in fact been trying to relieve the agitation of his mind by sailing rapidly around the lake, with innumerable tacks and jibs.

"Won't you come out with me?" he asked, cordially. "I'll take you to the other end, and you can walk back that way."

"Thanks," said Edith. "If Mr. Ravling —" She glanced at him to see if he also would accept that means of escape; and, fancying that he would,

stepped into the boat from the beach. He supported her arm as she did so ; then drew back and lifted his hat.

"I must make quick time to the village," he said.

"I'm going to take an early train."

"Shall you be up again?" asked the helmsman.

"No ; not this summer."

"But you think we may see you at Savage's," said Edith, in a friendly way. She hoped, on Viola's account, that he would come.

"Possibly," he replied, in a tone more gentle than was usual with him. He sought her eyes, and they exchanged a brief glance, which told him nothing.

Then the boat was pushed off, and he went swiftly back into the wood. The same aromatic odor saluted him, as before, and the distant birds were still singing ; but everything that gave the spot life for him was gone. All at once he came upon the forgotten shawl on which Edith had rested, and picked it up eagerly.

Whitcot seized his opportunity in the boat, to try to recede gracefully from the plan of going alone to Savage's, but Edith, out of pure mischief, parried his efforts, and he gave them up. When she reached her house, she found the shawl and a bunch of water-lilies awaiting her, from Ravling. She interpreted the flowers as a poetical sign of surrender to her wishes, which was in fact what he had meant to indicate in gathering them.

This little performance detained him until a later train. Dusk had come ; he seated himself as far as

possible from any lamp, and wished that a cold, pelting rain would descend, by way of giving him a frigid sympathy in his wretchedness. But as the night insisted on being fine, he closed his eyes and imagined the delights of plunging through some broken culvert or over a bad embankment. His whole life seemed shattered, and he thought it might as well end. Then, remembering the calm which he so successfully kept up amid all these pangs, a grotesque fancy struck him that he was like a piece of stone destined for a grave, which waits unmoved for the record of irreparable loss to be traced upon it, and goes on staring cheerfully for years at the sun which lights up its dreary inscription.

V.

ARCHDALE.

ON the same evening that Edith found the water-lilies left for her, Archdale was approached by his sister, Mrs. Savland, in a short talk of a confidential nature.

Mrs. Grace Savland was a lady who was undeniably growing old; but she did it so cleverly that her face, instead of being seamed with visible wrinkles, acquired an increasing though deceptive smoothness. How this happened I cannot say; but to the casual and uninitiated eye it would appear that sand-paper was delicately employed to secure such a result. She was frail in figure; her whole aspect was dainty; and whatever sorrows she had had, they found, it might have been fancied, a balm in that judiciously scented handkerchief which she was always taking out, and with which she stanchd her occasional tears.

"I wish, Thomas," she said, coming into his study soon after the lamp was lighted, "that you could be with us at Savage's. Would n't the change do you good?"

Elderly people carry their own climate in their bones, — an equipoise of the heat and cold of many years. So Archdale was not eager for change.

Besides, he knew from something in his sister's manner and the enforced patience with which she had folded the handkerchief in her hand, that this proposed benefit could not be her real object in speaking.

"You don't want me on *my* account," he said, in his gentle voice, which had about it the mellowness of candle-light and old books.

"No—not *entirely*," said Mrs. Savland, demurely. "I'll tell you why."

"I will listen," consented her brother. "But," he continued with a kind of cheerful petulance, "you know beforehand, of course, that for me to go with you would upset all my plans for the summer. I'm intending to make a special review of Justin and the other Apologists, and I can only do it here with all my books about me." Then, the interest of the theme presenting itself: "You know, Grace, that in the middle ground they occupied between Christianity and Pagan philosophy, they are objects of particular notice for us now. In these days we see the same sort of characters —"

"Then why," interrupted Mrs. Savland, with her unwrinkled smile and an air of happy discovery, — "why go back so far to study them?"

The old theologian, with his hands at his coat-front, tapped his thumbs together in mild annoyance. "How can you be so absurd, Grace? The reflection of our own traits in the blurred mirror of a former age, the tracing of the resemblance there —"

Mrs. Savland, cool and comfortable in her lilac-

muslin gown, was not to be heated or carried away by a sentence from one of his well-worn lectures. "Nothing could be truer, Thomas," she hastened to assure him. "I quite agree with you about the blur. But what I came to speak about was Edith and our stay at Savage's, this summer."

"Edith?" echoed Archdale. He had already forgotten how the conversation began.

"Yes. Haven't you seen how greatly young Burlen's interest in her increases?"

"I hardly think I've observed it."

"Is that because he's not an Apologist?" Mrs. Savland asked, feeling wicked. "It's true, any way, that his interest is growing; and what is more, Edith gives a great deal of thought to him."

Archdale began to look bothered, but attentive, — a sign hailed with joy by his sister. "That is strange," he remarked with precision; "especially when she knows so little about him."

"No, Thomas. The very circumstance that his history is obscure, and that she feels there is something in his past which calls for sympathy and kindness, is in his favor. It rouses sentiment without her knowing it." In this Mrs. Savland, if otherwise superficial, showed herself more penetrating than Archdale.

The perception of that fact vexed him, and so he immediately opposed her at hazard. "Really, even if you are right about all this," he said, "I don't see why I should object to it. Burlen is a fine fellow in every way." He hesitated a little, then went on.

"If Edith really cares for him, why should n't I —" There was a longer pause, but Mrs. Savland allowed him to accomplish his own ruin without interruption — "Yes; why should n't I trust her happiness to him?" But he had spoken with such increasing slowness, and at last peered so timidly through his glasses at Grace, that instead of the sentence coming out as a triumphant vindication of his wisdom, it was really a confession of weakness.

Content with this victory, Mrs. Savland gave him a chance to surrender at discretion. "Of course," said she, "if you have already thought it over and are perfectly prepared for the emergency, I have nothing more to say."

Archdale, as he had just shown, was not prepared; and he knew that she had discovered this. Hence, beguiled by masculine pride, he answered in a conclusive way: "I certainly sha'n't change my schemes on this account. Interference at present would hardly be justified, and you can watch affairs up there just as well as I could. Indeed —" he smiled with pleasure at his own generosity in making the admission — "I may almost say you will do it better."

Grace regretted her magnanimity. "Good night," she said, with tender reproach, as she rose and went to the door. Only her formal curls, the stiffness of her muslin, and her averted eyes expressed the full force of her injured severity. But when she got to her room she touched the corners of her eyes with the scented handkerchief.

The moment the door closed upon her, Archdale

became a prey to anxious reflection. All his thoughts were fixed upon what she had just referred to ; and before long he rose, rang the bell, and sent off by the servant a brief note directed to Burlen. It was plain, from his inaction after the servant had gone, that he was waiting for the young man to come to him. He sat perfectly silent. The lamplight shone on his polished head, scantily adorned with dark-gray hair that still grew thick where it grew at all, and revealed the clear, pure outline of his mouth and chin between the dogmatic side-whiskers whiter than the hair.

He was a man the very set of whose lips was so scholarly, that to look at them made one feel like consulting a Greek dictionary off-hand. There was a peculiar orderliness about him, reflecting the nature of his mind. His learning and his thinking were clean and starched. He read a classic as he would comb his hair (what was left of it), because it made him feel neat and presentable. Between the whiskers his face was shaven with particular smoothness and completeness ; and so even were his nerves, that, though his own hand held the razor, I do not think he had been known to cut himself with it once in twenty years.

Such precision was natural in a man whose ancestors for several generations had been exact in divinity. A hundred and fifty years before this particular evening, his great-grandfather had also sat in a New England pastor's study, under the fainter rushlight glimmer of his day, with sacred and solid books

around him. The great-grandfather was of course a sturdy Calvinist; but as a softer and broader illumination began to steal over the religious horizon, his son took his stand with the milder section of the church known as "Hopkinsians." By the time this son had grown to manhood and had two boys of his own, the liberal Arminians had begun to doubt the vicarious atonement and Christ's divinity; in a word, were becoming Arian, or Unitarian. One son chose the new path and went with the Liberals. The other retained the "Hopkinsian" Calvinist views of his sire; and this one was the father of Thomas Archdale. Even before their emigration from England the family had been a clerical one; and though Thomas alone now kept up the tradition, there tingled in his veins a sense of caste. He represented one of the few kinds of hereditary aristocracy that receive a careless, grudging recognition in America. And it was with something like the pride of a waning aristocracy that for many years he had written, taught, and preached, dreaming of the restoration of his Pilgrim forefathers' faith to its ancient power.

On Burlen, more than on any one else whom he had helped to educate, he had come to rely as the apostle who should go into Boston, battle with the doubters, convince the thinkers who were growing looser and looser, more and more secular, and bring back multitudes to a strait and solid belief. How was this new complication, this possible affection between the young man and Edith, going to influence

that prospect? Archdale thought he could see how such a factor might be made to help it; and yet—the door opened while he was in the midst of his speculations, after a light rap which he did not observe, and Burlen came in.

VI.

TRAGIC MEMORIES.

"**Y**OU wished to see me, sir?" asked the young man, looking, as Archdale thought, vaguely excited.

"Yes. Sit down, Robert; I want to talk with you."

Burlen took a stiff chair that stood near. Feeling that something momentous impended, "May I ask you—" he began.

"You wonder at my sending for you now," interrupted Archdale. "Yes. Well, it is of decided importance, the subject I wish to address you upon. You remember how, soon after the beginning of your studies here, when you appeared weighed down with sadness, I asked you if it would n't make you easier to tell me the cause of your depression?"

The student's eyes kindled. "Surely. It's your sympathy, then, that has kept me up ever since, and given me courage."

"And yet you remember, too," the Doctor went on, without pausing to recognize his warmth, "that you really told me almost nothing. Beyond the statement that your life had been full of darkness and misery, for which you were not to blame, you gave me no insight."

"But it was the kindness you showed, and your willingness to judge me only from what I was, that helped me. So many have made me feel that my want of well-known antecedents was a disgrace."

"I promised you that I would never allow such a want to make any difference with me, Robert. It was the barest charity in me to do that."

"And you don't repent, sir?" demanded Burlen, with some alarm.

"No, my boy. But you hinted that sometime you would tell me more. It seems to me that the period has arrived for a full confidence."

The graduate looked down, pressing his fingers tight into his palms, and said nothing for a moment. "Do you insist upon this?" he then asked, meeting his instructor's eyes, but with deep pain in his own.

"I would rather have you insist for me," said the older man in his gentlest tone. "What do you think is just and right?"

"I suppose I must tell you," Burlen answered, in a low voice, hoarse with trouble. "You are entitled by your great patience —" He broke off, and moved his seat to a spot more in shadow. "My father was a blacksmith," he suddenly announced. A shock of fastidious revolt at the fact went through Archdale. "But that is nothing," continued the other in a tone between defiant independence and bitter mortification. "He was a low, coarse man, who drank to excess, and was cruel to my mother. God forgive me! Is it a wrong, a sacrilege, for me to tell you so,

Dr. Archdale? Now you can see at least one thing that has sealed my lips, — the agony of saying this about my own father. I — I can't go on with it!"

"Take time," said Archdale. But if his voice ordinarily called up the image of mellow candle-light, one would have said now that there was a flicker in the flame. "You will find it easier, in a moment," he suggested.

"It's not *my* disgrace that troubles me," returned the graduate. "How am I to blame? Yet it's all so black and horrible; it is so utterly unnatural that I should have to suffer this, without having been able to prevent anything! And it's monstrous that I should have to recite the wickedness and disgrace of those who should have been my pride and love."

"Is your father living?" Archdale, racked by pity and apprehension, managed to ask.

"No. Dead!" was the answer. Burlen's voice seemed to descend into that absent, unknown grave which the words implied, — so deep and sorrowful it was. But presently he resumed: "All my memories seem to centre on one dreadful day, — the day when I struck him, my father!"

"*You!*" exclaimed Archdale, with horror.

"Oh, yes, yes! I whom you have loved, perhaps had a respect for! Yes, I did that. It's the one thing I have to repent of, and I have never ceased to feel the terror of myself, the disgust, that I felt then. But you have n't heard it all. There is some excuse. I'll tell you how it happened."

He paused, to nerve himself. Archdale, looking

at him, was amazed at the change that had come over his face. It was like that of a man engaged in gallant contest, the lines and expression strained from their usual bent to an overpowering intensity of struggle. A strong impulse of kindliness got the better of Archdale's distaste for the ugly revelation. But he waited and listened.

"He had been violent that day, and had abused my mother. I must tell you why; and this is the worst of all. I had a sister—" Burlen's voice broke. "The misery of it is, I have her still; at least I've never learned that she is not living, and the thought of what her life may be haunts me like a dream of hell. My sister was older than I." As he proceeded, his voice rose higher and swung along in a tone like that of some melancholy chant heard at a distance. "When I was about fourteen and she nineteen, she disappeared. I did not fully understand it, but my poor mother was nearly insane with despair. My father took it upon himself to get into a rage. He insisted that my sister had been sent away to get her beyond reach of our wretched home; and he demanded to know where she was. Of course my mother couldn't tell him. And then he struck her cruelly." The speaker bowed his head in his hand for a moment, desperate with the recollection. "I had seen him do so before; but something, that time, — because I was getting older I suppose, — made it unendurable. A shooting fire seemed to go from my heart through all my veins and sinews. I was almost blind with anger.

"I sprang upon him and hit him with all my might. It seemed as if I should fasten upon him and choke him; but he shook me off as I was shouting in his ear, 'If you strike her again, I'll kill you!' When he had thrown me off he glared at me strangely enough, but he did n't lift a finger to touch me. He was sobered and cowed. When I saw that, —" and for the first time since he had begun, Burlen looked straight into Archdale's eyes, his face hollow with anguish, — "when I saw that, it was more terrible than anything that had happened to me before. I turned and ran away from my own triumph, it was so unnatural and wrong. I went and hid in the woods, shattered with the recoil of my own passion and the awfulness of what I had done. Not for days and months did I recover. It was exactly as if that inner fire that had swept over me had left me singed and black, like a field that has been burnt over, and the innocent music of the grass silenced and driven out of it."

"This is very terrible," said Archdale; but the words fell upon his own ear as if they were merely something that he was repeating after another person.

"It was better for a while, after that day," the young man continued, quietly. "But still, the old troubles came back." He remained thinking so long that Archdale asked, —

"What was the end?"

"End? There's none: there was none! It's all with me now, — the whole story. It's a part of me.

My mother died in two years more, never having heard a word from Thyrsa, — my sister. Then I told my father I should go ; and I left him, to try to support myself. It was a hard path, but I began to have hope. I remember well one night, not long before mother died, how I walked out alone in the starlight, almost crushed by the sorrow and degradation I had been through. On the top of a small, bare hill I stopped, and then I felt the sweet breezes coming towards me like messengers. I smelt the wild, fresh perfumes from the woods. First I wondered why such perfumed breezes blew, and I so unhappy. Then they lifted my heart up, and I had a sudden vision of a brighter world this side of heaven ; a life of exuberant freedom and purity. That was really, I think, the beginning of my aspiration towards the ministry.”

“Did you begin to carry it out?” asked his listener.

“No ; I could n’t begin at once — afterward. And then, when I had studied somewhat by myself, it seemed to me that my first duty was to find my sister, — that I should n’t be prepared for my work, without. I tried the few clues I had. I got employment in Boston, and searched for her there. Ah, what a search ! The places and people that my first clues led me to, I’m sure you never have seen anything like them. What women ! Worse in their desperate ruin, they are, than the most brutal man I’ve ever encountered. And it was from them I was trying to find out something about Thyrsa ! I never

found out anything with certainty ; I fancied I had got upon her track, sometimes, but it led away from Boston again, I did n't know where to. Finally I gave it up, or postponed it. I regarded it as my mission ; but, with my bread to win, it was hopeless. So I looked for a place in a country store, and worked and studied there till I had saved enough to begin my course here."

"And the rest I know," said Archdale, with returning composure. Nothing more was said for several minutes, and Burlen walked away into the darker part of the room.

His gray-haired friend gazed after him with a sentiment approaching awe. Into that young brain and that slender frame of manhood had been packed an amount of experience, of mental and spiritual torture, which made Archdale feel himself the younger of the two.

"It is far better that you have told me the whole," said he, presently. "I understand you better for it ; I may say I appreciate you better." At this Burlen turned with a swift look of gratitude, and came forward a step towards the light again. "You will find, too," the good Doctor went on, "that you are better off for it. Sympathy gives one freedom. You have mine, fully ; and you must n't brood morbidly over any act of your own in the past, like that which you have described."

Burlen approached still nearer. "I can't thank you for this," he said, yet in a voice that vibrated with thanks. "It is too good. You understand,

now, what has been weighing on me, and how the dread of my life, since I was fourteen, has been that a fiendish wrath, such as my father excited in me, might sometime sweep me away again. Any unusual sensation of anger has made my conscience burn me like a hot iron. But I hope I have beaten out the roots of the evil temper. At any rate, I am much more hopeful now that I have spoken with you."

But there was a reserve in Archdale, which checked the speaker.

In a republic, like the United States, the instinctive recoil or inherited prejudice of certain people in the presence of unpleasant social conditions, accidents of birth or fortune which they regard with disfavor, is often as strong as in the Old World. They may be able to recognize theoretically the existence of the highest qualities in people of the humblest origin, and generally do recognize them after success and public honor have emphasized them. But the crude facts, when they are suddenly confronted with these in their own associations, are still distasteful; and they throw every obstacle they can in the way of the supposed inferior. Class distinctions, in spite of optimistic theory, are maintained with acrimonious vigilance, though the classes are defined on a different plan and vary more in outline than those of Europe. The observers of these distinctions, having no fixed safeguard arranged for them by law and by the servility of inferior orders, are made all the more sensitive by constant irritations to their dignity. Hence American class prejudice

is alert and sometimes singularly unconquerable. Archdale's sense of ancestral superiority, aided by long, secluded commerce with the cultivated and respectable, rose against the fact of Burlen's vulgar lineage. He had never expected anything so appalling to be revealed, because he had viewed him always solely in an intellectual light. The young candidate was conscious of a drawing back on his preceptor's part, and noticed that he was brooding.

"Does what I have told you about my origin and — my family — make you feel different towards me?" he asked.

Archdale fixed his studious lips with a trifle more exactness than common, and appeared to reflect. "Frankly," he replied, "it does. It is a great surprise, and it is all very painful. But I promised you long since that I would judge you by yourself. I renewed the promise this evening, as it chanced, before you began. I am going to act upon it, Burlen."

The young man sighed. There was an air of constrained justice about this answer which depressed him. He wished, too, that the Doctor had called him "Robert," and that he had offered him his hand. "There is one thing more, sir," he said finally. "I forgot to speak of it before I began my story. It is" — Archdale turned his spectacles up to him inquiringly — "that you won't tell any of it at present to Mrs. Savland, or — to Miss Edith."

"Is it not better to be open about it?" suggested Archdale, with his neatest and most punctual accent.

Burlen answered promptly: "Not at the risk of great injustice to myself. Even you find it difficult to take me as I am, now that you know all about me. I ask you simply to wait about telling the ladies, who are almost my only friends, — and I am to pass the summer with them, — until there has been time to adjust it more fully in your mind."

On being recalled to the projected close neighborhood of Edith and Burlen, Archdale experienced a keen distress. Why had he not listened to his sister, who would probably have been able even to have devised an adroit change of plan? But it was too late now, and he felt himself bound. "You certainly have a right to be considered in your wish on this subject," he declared, without betraying his trouble. "I consent. But I think you ought, on your part, to agree to one thing."

"Willingly, if I can. What is it?"

"That you will not take — well, take advantage, I was going to say — *in any way*, of my reserve."

The clear brown in Burlen's cheeks turned to red. "I will promise," he said. "But perhaps, if you think me capable of that, I had better take leave of you all."

"Don't be hurt, my boy!" cried Archdale, startled out of his constraint. "I did n't mean to do you wrong. I see; I see. Yes, Robert, I trust you." Saying which, he held out his hand.

Burlen took the hand, pressed it, and went away with a slow step.

VII.

SAVAGE'S. — AN ODD ENCOUNTER.

FROM a point directly over it, in the air, Monadnoc, towering high above a chain of lower ridges, would take on the semblance of a gigantic arrow-head, mapped upon the lower country in ribs of rock and earth, and with the point turned southward. It was this point which had thrown its bold, blue projection into the farthest gap of the landscape which Edith and the three young men had contemplated from the Cleft.

The flanks of the mountain are the flanges of the arrow-head, one longer than the other; and deep between them is scooped a vast ravine — across which it takes a powerful bird some minutes to fly — descending to an exquisite lake at the north, ringed round with smaller hills, among which it sparkles like a diamond of unearthly size, but meek, peaceful, and unpretentious in its setting of young wild-wood trees. And this, although it has the distinction of harboring a species of trout which Agassiz pronounced unique in the whole country. From the lake, and still more precipitously from the serrated crown of the mountain, the land falls quickly away on either side, into valleys rolling on to other lines of lesser altitude. Below the naked summit, a thick,

elastic covering of trees mats the broad sides and robust spurs as they descend; brooks tinkle and pour from steep to steep, hidden under the greenery; black-brown rivers chafe angrily at the base, or draw from a distance tributary rills into their silver-reflecting circuits through rich meadow-lands. Farm-houses creep up daringly in the glades or on the breezy buttress-lines of the enormous primeval mound, — sometimes a deserted farm being swallowed up in the ever-waiting forest, its orchard choked by encroaching maple, beech, and oak; at other times a new settler audaciously chopping out timber for winter hauling, and keeping his fields cultivated in the midst of the wood. A village clings to one side of the range, like a collection of rice-grains. Lower down, other villages crop out under every variety of adverse condition; some of them swell into little towns; church steeples spring up like some curious form of pointed mushroom growth; a railroad penetrates; woollen mills get triumphantly astride of the rivers, — in fine, the reign of man asserts itself, and is completely overshadowed by the reign of the majestic hills.

One form of its assertion, at the time of which I write, was Savage's Mills, — a thriving village, long established; energetic in the matter of flannels and roller-cut cloth, famous for its wagons; taking revenge upon the frightful winter climate by manufacturing unerring and deadly thermometers, and abounding in consumptives, several of whom annually ceased being consumptives — or indeed anything

else — in deference to the river-fogs of summer and the thaws of January. By a curious yet natural coincidence, the aborigines had been supplanted by a race of white Savages. The Savage family bore the chief hereditary honors in a pure local democracy, and gave the place its name. Having a certain traditional leadership, and being, according to the region, rich, they would have been detested by all the other citizens as feudal aristocrats, obnoxious to the well-being of the nation, if they had not studiously kept up the shabby manners and mild semi-illiteracy of their ancestors. These, to be sure, were their birthright, and the pride they took in even such an order of family distinction might have been deemed perilous to society. But the community was willing to pass that over.

The present representatives were "Mother" Savage, who dwelt in an over-correct white house, with green blinds and a long piazza ornamented by a scalloped wooden cornice, assisted by her three sons. Dressed in a faded bed-gown that made her look like an exhumed specimen of some lost order of insects, she did her own household work, and spent her leisure hours wholly in bed, smoking a short pipe and reading novels. Her eldest son Absalom, a big, red-bearded person with a dull expression (as if for some years he had been trying to grow deaf and could not quite succeed), had become the owner of the woollen-mill. Epenetus B., — nervous and black-haired, and possessing a face like a disturbed shadow, — was interested in thermometers

and continually drove a restless buggy through the adjacent country, in search of small chances to speculate. The third son was Serious Savage. He kept the hotel, nominally, though his brisk, pale wife really managed the business. His chief accomplishment was the facility with which he drummed on his teeth with his fingers during conversation, and while listening to the wants of his patrons; though I am bound to say that the village folk never saw anything remarkable in this. They were more impressed by his unbroken languor, which they mistook for thought.

On an early day of July and near the hour of noon, Serious and a group of his friends were seated in the brick-floored portico at the front of the hotel, trying to persuade themselves that they were engaged in conversation. The portico appeared to have been added to the establishment for the convenience of flies and loafers, its sole occupants, and was provided with thin, white, wooden columns of much the same form and dignity as bed-posts, — an architectural feature that perhaps flattered Serious with a suggestion of his mother's luxurious habits. After one of the frequent intervals of silence which reduced their conversation to a mere illusion, a sort of mental mirage created by the intense, settled heat of the day, one of the group hit upon a fresh subject. This successful personage was Breck the jeweller.

"Has Tarbox struck water yet, with that well of his'n he's diggin'?" he asked, wearily.

The query was put forth as common property; but

Major Brown at once acted on his well-known prescriptive right to answer any question that might be asked in the village. "No, he hain't," said the Major, contemptuously; "and what's more, he's losin' five cents every foot he goes down, 'cordin' t' his contrac'-price. Fact is, you may say he's put his foot in it to the tune of a five-cent piece."

The others acknowledged the wit of this remark by a unanimous but indolent and husky giggle.

The Major's position, as he tilted his chair at a sharp angle against the boards of the hotel wall, brought into mournful relief against the white paint his dented stove-pipe hat, the rim of which was bound with a narrow ribbon of stained and faded blue, and caused his brown nankeen legs to dangle towards the pavement in a forgetful manner. A number of fawning flies were engaged in worshipping his boots; five others were delightedly traversing the brown nankeen, and two, more ambitious than the rest, promenaded on his hat-brim. Otherwise, except for the more guarded adulation of the men around him, there was nothing to indicate his importance as sheriff of the county and owner of the last remaining stage-line to Savage's.

Time had been, before the incursion of railroads, when Major Brown had ruled over various lines of coach-travel; but those palmy days were over, and he had now adopted, as the survivor of a better era, a tone of ponderous dissatisfaction and nameless regret, which he thought becoming to him. As for the flies, he no longer cared, since railroads had come

into vogue, whether dipterous insects continued to exist or not; and as for men, he accepted their homage in much the same spirit.

"Tarbox ain't no artesian any way," observed James Wadkin, the village barber, continuing the subject of the well. "He tries his hand too free in different kinds of work." Then he gave utterance to an original economic maxim which he was proud of: "A man shouldn't do but a little of anything only what he's calculated for."

"H'm," muttered Serious, opening his lips and looking as if about to drum on his teeth; which, however, he failed to do.

"Guess it's pretty much about so," stated the Major, conclusively.

Another tribute was paid to his authority, in the form of a subdued murmur. The remaining member of the company was young Card, who had lately taken advantage of a small local feud to establish a new hardware store at Savage's; and Card testified his support of the Major by a well-modulated cough. He was sure it had helped him along a step or two in the path of prosperity.

All were silent for a minute, after this. It was a triumph that anything should have been said at all, and they basked in the glow of it.

"I und'stand," said Breck, fixing his one earnest eye on Serious (it had the look of having been photographed, and so rendered unable to change its expression, while the other was perfectly listless),—"I und'stand that Tarbox is goin' to take to takin' summer-boarders, too."

"So?" exclaimed Wadkin, disdainfully.

There was another silence, and Serious was about to reopen the well, with as much interest as if truth lay at the bottom, when Card, looking off, startled them by saying, "There's a stranger coming, Ser'ous!"

"Where?" was the chorus of all but the proprietor, who was able to give his renowned apathy redoubled effect, by paying no attention.

"I'kn see him," said the Major, as if nothing more were necessary. "He's on the east hill, comin' down the road. Don't you know him, Waddy?"

"No," said the barber; and Breck and Card could n't refrain from asking the Major, "Do you?"

To this he deigned no reply. He turned towards the hotel-keeper. "Who you expectin', Ser'ous?"

"Most anybody," was the answer, in a melancholy tone.

Waddy at this point developed a sudden superciliousness towards the approaching pedestrian. "Where can a man come from," he queried suspiciously, "that goes traipsing a-foot through the country with a bag on his hip, like that?"

"Some shack, most likely," said Major Brown, severely; meaning a tramp.

Breck and Card saw with grief the mistake they had made in barely hinting that such a character might be known to the Major. Card cast about for means to retrieve himself. "It's pootty near time for the stage," he ventured. "Do you s'pose, Major,

that he's *walked* all the way from Medoosic, or has n't he rode on the stage and is just promenarding ahead?"

This theory somewhat mollified the autocrat, though he respected himself too much to let it appear that he had not already thought of it. "That's reasonable," he said, affably, "if it was you or me. But some of these folks from Boston have queer idees of how to enjoy themselves. Why, Ser'ous," he continued, turning to that individual, "do you remember John E. Barker?"

"I don' know but I do."

"Your father would have rec'lected. John E. Barker was cousin to R. V. Swift. You know *that*?"

Serious was leaning against the railing at the end of the porch, and swung his chair dexterously on one leg, as a pivot, far enough to give his head without other effort a brief, affirmative bob. But this did n't quite satisfy the Major's notions of proper explicitness, and he persisted until Savage admitted that he knew both men. It might be supposed that when one man says to another, "You know John E. Barker, or R. V. Swift?" and the second man says "Yes," that this would be enough. But it is not. It is always necessary that the first speaker should next go on to explain with great minuteness who John E. Barker and R. V. Swift are or were; what was their personal appearance; what they do or did; and what their parents were in the habit of doing. While Major Brown was following out all these

branches of his subject, the stranger — having disappeared from the east hill — was advancing by a lower part of the road; and before the foundations of the sheriff's reminiscence had been laid, footsteps mingled with his utterance.

"Sorry to interrupt you," said the new-comer, without any appearance of regret, "but I want to find out where Mr. Tarbox's house is. Can any of you tell me?"

"Guess could, if we tried," Serious responded; intending no offence, but wishing to put himself on an equality with his interrogator by adopting a tone of easy, familiar humor. Thereupon he shut his teeth and beat a tattoo on them.

By this time it was clear that the traveller, who wore a light-gray suit, with gray gaiters over his dusty shoes, — Richard Whitcot, in short, — could not have come by the stage, which in that case would have passed him on the descent into the town. The Major addressed him accordingly. "Come by the stage," said he, "and you'd ha' been taken right to the door."

"I'll go right to it now," said Whitcot, tartly, "if you'll tell me where it is." Whereat the Major rose grandly and walked into the hotel. Card didn't dare to give any information, after this; Waddy followed the Major; and Breck fixed his earnest eye on Whitcot, in silence.

"T ain't much of a walk," said Serious, in a casual way. "Stop for dinner?"

"It seems I'm likely to," returned Whitcot, "if I wait for you to tell me the way to Tarbox's."

"Oh," observed the landlord, with the surprise of a mind superior to strife, "I did n't s'pose you was in any partic'lar hurry. It's right up street here — third house be-yand the Second Church."

"The second one, eh?" And the gray gaiters resumed their march along the rough dirt-sidewalk.

"There's the first church, not far ahead," reflected their wearer, as he advanced. He soon came abreast of it, — a brick edifice, belfry-crowned and set back behind a grass-plot which was surrounded by crazy wooden posts, chained together as if in danger of falling if left to themselves.

No other church was in sight, but as the road took an upward turn to the right, he moved on briskly, thinking he should soon pass the one that was to serve him as a landmark. His thoughts ranged fast and wide as he went along, and he did not at first notice that the houses became less frequent in the direction he was taking. By and by the discovery that he was continually ascending, and had gone some distance, caused him to look about again. He found that he had nearly reached the top of a small, round hill overlooking the village, and that the road ran on into the country with no accompaniment of dwellings. In vain he looked for a second spire; the only two visible besides the one he had just passed lay in quite other quarters of the glen below.

"Confound them!" he exclaimed, shaking his fist at the top of the inoffensive hotel. "They've misdirected me, maliciously." Then he remembered

what had been said about Burlen's possibly becoming the pastor of the "Second Church;" and his error dawned upon him. "At least I shall be able to show him the way, when he comes," he laughed.

At that moment the scream of a locomotive rose from the valley. He heard the dull hum of the cars, and saw a long web of smoke weaving itself above the trees and unravelling itself again while the front of it worked towards the village. Under the web he knew that Edith and Burlen were being borne along to their destination. He decided to go down and meet them at the hotel.

Before he had gone six steps some one crossed the road in front of him, and seemed to take a foot-path leading down the hill. It was an energetic, bareheaded young woman with a dark face rather striking in outline as it flitted by. Whitcot took her to be a farmer's daughter or a factory-girl; but her spirited bearing interested him for the moment, and he conceived the notion of going after her, to ask the way to Tarbox's.

"Hold on!" he cried, gesticulating, as he came up to where he could see her following the short-cut.

The girl turned to look; became alarmed, as it seemed, and began to run. "Fury!" he muttered, stopping short. "This is the most extraordinary place I ever got into. Uncommunicative, decidedly. No one appears to want me here." And in a far from good humor he retraced his way down the hill.

All the morning Edith, Mrs. Savland, and Burlen

had been making their way by steam from the lower levels of Massachusetts into the rough entanglement of the Monadnoc region. They got into a narrow valley; the train dropped one car after another, as if to quicken its flight; then a dark, foamy river made its appearance, going in the same direction, and entered into a race with the engine. They crossed it, were headed off by it, caught up with it again; all the time passing through breadths of deep wood-shadow or shooting out into broad sunshine that flooded the car, so that some great green curtain seemed to be alternately drawn and flung back between them and the light. At length the engine slacked its speed, and the river, growing quieter, ran still and glassy towards the mill-dams: there was just room enough for the track, the current, and a turnpike between the two steep ridges that banked in the village. As they glided over this last stretch Edith broke into delighted exclamations at the bold, fresh scenery that trended upward to the sky on either hand. Savage's Mills was forced into picturesque by its very situation. She laughed outright at the "cunning" appearance of the small abodes nestled along the acclivities like amplified bird-boxes, prim and hard in their outlines, but often brightened by some touch of beauty, — a clustering vine, a blooming oleander, or a body-guard of quaint, yellow-collared sun-flowers.

"I feel as if I could put my hand out of the window," she said, "and pat these little cottages on their roofs, without their being offended."

"I think," said Burlen, on an impulse, "they might bear it—from you." During the short journey he had made more than a geographical progress.

Arrived, they were carried in an officious open cart to the hotel, a few rods away, and there, clattering up a flight of iron-bound steps, were led into small, pantry-like rooms provided with meagre apparatus for sleeping and washing. Burlen had just got his head into a bowl of water, when a terrifying clangor echoed through the halls from a gong, intended to express the emotions with which mankind, in that locality, received the announcement of dinner. Lifting his head in showery haste, he heard a knock at the door, and the voice of Serious saying dreamily: "Dinner's ready, Mister."

"Is there any hurry?" he asked in some alarm, knowing the momentary and rapacious character of the feast in American rural hotels.

"No," returned the unseen Serious, in a disappointed tone. He believed himself to have executed matters in the "city style," and found the effort unappreciated.

He was partially compensated, however, by finding Whitcot returned upon his hands for dinner.

While the engineer was putting the last touch to a hasty toilet in a small room behind the office-counter, he looked through a window into the roomy cobblestoned court enclosed by the hotel and its stables. The lumbering, old, yellow stage-coach had arrived and stood drawn up in one corner, like a disabled wasp, on the grass-grown pavement. Suddenly

against this yellow background there appeared the figure of a young woman in a fresh flowered calico, — a shapely girl, with something unusually effective in the style of her dress, and a striking quality in her handsome, browned face. She had just issued from a side-door, and in a moment passed on to the stables. Whitcot saw that it was the same girl he had encountered on the hill, and, concluding that she would come back presently, he strolled around into the court-yard, moved by a curiosity to scan her more closely. As he entered it through the covered driveway from the front, she was returning from her message to the stables. It was obvious that she was employed in the inn.

Despite her physical vigor and a degree of boldness in her features, there was a tinge of delicate melancholy in her expression. It was something twilight-like and strange; a sadness, a remorse, a grieving memory perhaps; something that might have been the faint wave-mark of ancestral sorrow or sin, or slavery of some kind. Very evasive it was, and yet it impressed Whitcot at once. With this impression there came to him a vaguely defined premonition of danger, unusual in his experience, — a spontaneous conviction that the touch of her life to another life might, under given circumstances, be full of extraordinary peril.

“Look here,” he said, benevolently, “did n’t I see you just now, up on the hill?”

She looked at him with some appearance of thinking that he intruded. “Perhaps you did, if I was

there," she returned carelessly, and was moving away.

"Wait a minute," he persisted. "I want to know why you ran off when I called to you. Why did you?"

"I was afraid," said the girl, abruptly; yet her smile was by no means timorous.

"Afraid! That's very singular. I had been misdirected, and wanted to ask you the way. Afraid of *me*? This is really a very peculiar place."

"Oh, I was n't afraid of *you*. I thought"—she nodded towards the interior of the hotel—"I thought you were some one else."

"That was it, eh? Another man like me?"

"Yes; or you're like him," she said, rather saucily.

"In there? In the hotel?"

"Pro'bly he's in there now."

She made a move to pass on; but it struck Whitcot as a slightly sensational incident that so resolute and competent-looking a girl should be afraid of some man who resembled him. "You said you were n't afraid of me," he continued, rather piqued that the other individual should be more powerful than himself. "Did you mean you could n't, anyway, be afraid of me?"

She laughed; perhaps suspecting his small vanity. Then, becoming serious, she raised her searching eyes and looked him all over, as if she were some creature of the dark, who could see without being seen, and therefore had no hesitation in scrutinizing

another person. "Well, no," she said, reflectively. "I suppose I might possibly, if you were to behave badly enough. I don't see what it is to you, any way. — I must go in to the dinner now."

"I must have a look at my double, too," said he, half to himself. "By the way, what's his name?"

She threw herself back a little, from the waist up, and with an odd gesture pointed a half-bent arm towards the house. "His name? Ask him."

For some reason Whitcot found it easy to talk freely with this mysterious young woman, and he took advantage of the fact to put an impertinent question. "I should like to know why you're afraid of him," he said. "Is he your husband?"

The girl shook her head with a dark smile, in which a hidden scorn lurked, like the bitter dregs in wine. "No. He has n't got anything to do with me. But I'm afraid of people sometimes. Everybody is, if they've a mind to be."

"Well, I should say he had no good reason to make you uncomfortable," Whitcot remarked.

"No, nor bad one either," the strange girl answered, keenly.

Seeing that he had been drawn much further than he intended, and not liking the situation, the engineer was glad to have this peculiar colloquy close. But just as they were turning to separate, a shutter in the upper story of the hotel was flung back, with a flat sound, from a window looking directly down upon them. Their eyes were attracted sharply

upward by it, and there they both saw Edith, who paused for an instant after opening the shutter, having caught sight of Whitcot; apparently surprised at seeing him there side by side with so unwonted a companion.

VIII.

RUDYARD.

EDITH immediately withdrew from the window again, but Richard was vexed that she should have happened to observe him at that moment. He reproached himself for his blundering curiosity in coming out to speak to the unknown young woman. But, "I only wanted to ask her a simple and reasonable question," he thought; and hereupon he became indignant that Miss Archdale should have looked surprised.

The girl noticed his annoyed air. "You are sorry that lady saw you here," was her comment, given in a way that made it something between taunt and triumph.

Being nettled, he replied without dignity: "Well, you would be sorry too, I presume, if your — whoever he is — your alarming man in there should see you talking to me."

"Poh!" cried she, snapping her fingers. "What do I care? But you *know* you're sorry: you just said so." She displayed an impish satisfaction at the idea.

"I did n't say so," declared Whitcot, weakly.

"Well, I *hope* you've kept me here long enough to suit you," she said, and tripped away through the

side-door; leaving the young man rather dazed at his own folly in having placed himself on a footing with a woman in her station, and getting into dispute with her on a point connected with Edith, before he even knew who she was.

The dining-room of *Savage's Hotel* was a bare, ugly, scrupulously clean apartment filled with narrow tables, at which a variety of individuals were seated, all eating with a sad kind of energy as *Whitcot* entered. The dinner grouped together, almost with the swiftness of instantaneous photography, a thin, scalding pea-soup, beef roasted to the dryness of a mummy, some vegetables, and a rhubarb pie,—accompanied by cups of green tea so strong and maddening that an army served with it before battle would have been in a fair way to come out victorious.

The dark-faced girl whom he had just left was waiting at one of the tables. *Whitcot* took his place at another, with *Mrs. Savland's* party.

Besides *Card*, *Waddy*, and *Major Brown*, the company comprised the usual broad, overgrown, good-natured man with jet-black hair, redundant beard, jaws and lip blue from the dense bristles of shaven whiskers, and cheeks full-colored and clear,—a prize-product of fast growth and excessive vitality, to be found in most American villages, and causing you to look him over in vain for the "First Premium" card which you imagine the agricultural committee must have awarded him. There were also several premature, self-satisfied, nondescript youths, and two

women marked by that restless, withered, and vaguely ambitious type of countenance which comes from protracted hotel-life. Besides these there was a travelling salesman, who fancied that he had acquired the polished ease of the best society, but turned out not to be quite the genuine article. He was rather a cheap adulteration of urban dandyism, supplied in any desired (or undesired) quantity to "the trade," and at a liberal discount.

Finding no conceivable resemblance to himself in any of these, Whitcot was obliged to look for it in a young man dressed, like himself, in gray, and wearing a light-hued mustache. He was a good deal sunburned, and had on a very clean white shirt; but no necktie. Whitcot certainly did not feel flattered by the supposed resemblance; yet the young fellow was not bad-looking, and at a distance — well, they might have been mistaken for one another by a person crossing the road in haste. Involuntarily, the engineer sent an inquiring glance towards the waitress as she passed behind this presumed double, and he thought her look in reply meant "yes."

"But why should she fear this harmless-looking fellow?" he asked himself. "There is something strange about it."

Against his better judgment he kept thinking about these two individuals, with whom so far as he knew he had no personal concern, nor ever could have. He stared at the young man, — a mechanic, apparently, — and speculated in regard to him. He tried talking with Mrs. Savland and looking in other

directions ; but his attention always swung back as rigidly as a pendulum.

At last the cravatless young man, whose gaze had been concentrated on his plate, felt his observer's scrutiny, and in a motionless sort of way brought his eyes warily up so as to command the engineer. They were clear, dark-gray eyes, in which a stilly fire glowed. They seemed to meet Whitcot's with instantaneous, dogged enmity.

A most singular, unaccountable gaze ! Perhaps the man himself was not fully aware of its deliberate, knife-like penetration ; but it was so unexpected to Whitcot that he flinched before it. Careless, superficial, unaccustomed to alarm, he none the less felt a chilly shock on meeting those firm gray orbs. His own eyes fell ; an instinctive horror touched his mind, and he began to understand the sad-faced girl's dread. After this he ignored the gray-clad mechanic, who shortly left the room ; but he was unable to eat another mouthful.

"Shall you stay at the hotel?" Mrs. Savland asked him, looking around with a silent criticism that would have embittered Serious, had he seen it. She had come to dinner with her bonnet on, in token of protest against the martyrdom of receiving daily bread in such a room.

"I sha'n't stay if I can help it," said Whitcot. "I've got a room at Mr. Tarbox's, but have n't been able to find it. And where is this place you're going to?"

"A Mr. Pride's. It's a farm, you know."

Whitcot, with some liveliness, narrated his attempt to get directed to his boarding-place. When he came to the part about the young woman fleeing before him, "I felt as if I belonged to a menagerie and had just broken out of my cage," he asserted. But Edith did not laugh as much as he had hoped she would. "By the way," he added, "it was this very girl that's waiting at the other table. I saw her in the courtyard just now, and went out to identify her as a curious specimen. Now she 'evolutes' all at once into a waitress. That's *my* species: I'm a waiter — for Tarbox's. By and by I shall naturally select myself into a fully developed boarder."

"We're here till further orders, too," laughed Burlen. "Mr. Pride's got to come and carry us up his hill, — everybody lives on a hill here, — and he has n't yet appeared. It's about two miles out, didn't you say, Mrs. Savland?"

"Yes. You," she added to Whitcot, "must come up there often."

The invitation was very cordial. He thanked her, and his spirits rose again.

Strolling into the office afterward, he lit a cigar and contemplated Serious Savage, who was nibbling an orange-wood toothpick in a dejected manner. "Is that your daughter," he asked bluntly, "who waits on the longest table?"

"I don't know," said the proprietor, listlessly. "I guess not," he added, with an air of carefully weighing the probabilities. "I hain't got any daughter."

"Who is it, then?"

"One o' the gals, I p'sume."

"I discovered that for myself. But what's her name? Fine-looking she is; dark — something like a gypsy," said Whitcot; it just occurring to him that there was a hint of the Romany about her.

"Oh," said Serious, "I guess you mean Idy, don't you? Idy Hiss. Yes, she's one o' my gals."

"You mean you employ her?"

"Certin."

"Then what has she got to do with that young fellow who was in there at dinner? — man with a light mustache, dressed in gray, and looks like" — Whitcot stopped short, with disrelish, and changed his phrase. "That's to say, he's about my size, you know."

Instead of answering, Serious put his head on one side, and asked as if for information: "Look here, young man, ain't you consid'able cur'ous?"

"Ain't *you*?" retorted the civil engineer, mimicking him slightly.

The landlord appeared to enjoy this hugely. Laughing behind his closed teeth, he retreated around the office-counter, pretended to examine his accounts, and then said: "You mean Rudyard. Yes, yes. Well, how sh'd I know what he's got to do with Idy? Ask him. Or ask her. Or ask Timothy Pride."

"Pride? Hullo! That's the name of the people where — these Prides live about two miles from here, up the hills, don't they?"

"Thereabouts."

Whitcot drew his cigar into a glow again and betook himself to the brick-floored porch, in a thoughtful fit. The coincidence of one of the Prides being thus mentioned as interested in the girl Ida struck him as exceedingly odd, and he believed that quite by accident he had stumbled upon some unusual complication which it would be amusing to watch during his stay. More and more curious to know what it could be, he made up his mind to accost Rudyard if he should see him again. That disagreeable glance which he had received now seemed of less consequence than at first; perhaps because the victory-giving tea at dinner had braced his nerves.

While he was meditating, a wagon drove up to the portico, from which a long-limbed woodsman dismounted.

"Do you know anything about a man named Burlen, in there?" he asked shyly, holding his shabby whip in one hand and pulling at the lash with the other. He eyed Whitcot, as if suspecting that he was the person in question.

"Yes, I know a good deal about him. He's inside, with the two ladies. Do you want to see him?"

"Then *you* ain't him?" said the man, relieved to find that Whitcot was merely an impersonal stranger.

"No. Are you Mr. Pride?"

"Yes, sir; that's my name." He became shy again, on being identified.

"And where's Timothy?" asked Whitcot.

Pride grinned with pleased astonishment. "Do you know Tim'thy?"

"You can't think how much I want to see him!" exclaimed Richard, feigning the delight of an old comrade. "Mr. Pride, I'd like to shake hands with you."

The farmer suspected some recondite joke, but extended his long, leathery palm for the other's fingers to close upon.

"Let's see; what's your name?" he asked, with that air of having momentarily forgotten something familiar as the month or year, which his class flatteringly assume towards a stranger, when they wish to be on their guard. Receiving Richard's answer, he remarked: "Guess 't would be full as well for me to go and look for Mr. Burlen;" and thereupon strode slowly into the hallway, with a peculiar gait formed by long habit in walking over rising or uneven ground. It consisted of a deliberate step, beginning with a general dip downward of that side of the person which was advancing, followed by a brief pause to recover equilibrium, and an economical bringing up of the hinder leg.

The ladies and Burlen were soon ready. Whitcot helped them bestow their small parcels in the wagon, and waited to see them off. "You'll come and look at our place to-morrow or next day," Edith said pleasantly, taking it for granted; "so it's hardly a good-by." He watched them disappear over the upland road.

When he stepped into the hall again, the door of

the vacant dining-room was open, and Rudyard was standing at the threshold with Ida Hiss. Remembering his decision to speak to the man, Whitcot said, without embarrassment: "Perhaps you can tell me just where Tarbox's house is. I've tried to find it once, but I didn't succeed; got way out into the fields beyond, in fact. Then I saw this — this young lady" — the word, in such ultra-democratic application, cost him an effort, and he stopped as he indicated Ida.

Rudyard instantly turned upon her in fierce jealousy. "What were you doing up there, I'd like to know?" he demanded.

For a moment she seemed cowed. Then with a careless confidence surprising to Whitcot after her declaration of fear: "What's that to you?" she replied; going on with disproportionate passion: "I almost wish there *was* some secret about it, seeing you're so masterful. You'd never find it out, if there was; no — not if you *killed* me!" And she set her teeth hard, so that between her half-parted lips they shone with a determined gleam.

The witness of this outburst between the two was made extremely uncomfortable by it, and again regretted that he had come into the girl's neighborhood. But, once more to his surprise, Ida's vehemence rather pleased her rude admirer. He smiled almost approvingly, and turned his attention back to the engineer.

"I'm going up past there myself," he said. "It's on the way to the woollen-mill where I work; and

I'll show you the house." Whitcot, rather bewildered, accepted the offer and began to wonder at his first horror of the man. That cold, rigid enmity was no longer discernible in his eyes, though there was still something repellent about them.

A brief walk brought Richard to his goal, — a neat, low house with projecting eyebrows of mossy-shingled eaves, set up on a bank and approached by a flight of rickety steps under the shade of a catalpa-tree. Mounting the steps he knocked at the door, but got no answer. He then went along the grassy bank a few paces and halted opposite a window hung with white side-curtains, between which he could look in. It was a low-ceiled, antique room that he surveyed. Its dusky walls, its old, gilded, wooden clock, its stained what-not displaying china ornaments, and its colored prints in frames of varnished pine-cones, all had so obsolete and confined a look that he could almost smell its musty flavor through the glass. In the centre stood a dinner-table, at which a man sat, with his back to the light. The back was covered with a faded waistcoat, from which the arms projected in shirt-sleeves, and was moreover perfectly motionless. The man had either dropped asleep or was thinking hard.

He turned when Whitcot tapped on the pane, presenting a middle-aged, dusty face. The front of his head was bald, and he looked as obsolete as the room itself. He might have sat there for years, letting the dust gather in his wrinkles and the hair gradually fall from his forehead. And there he

appeared likely to remain sitting, for at first he made no show of responding to Whitcot's pantomimic references to the door. Finally, however, he rose; apparently got lost somewhere in the interior, and found himself again just in time to meet Whitcot at the threshold.

"You're Mr. Tarbox, I take it?"

"Yes. Be you the young man from the city?"

Happy distinction, practised in the country, of conferring on one individual the dignity of an entire population!

"Well, no," said Richard, "I come from Marle. But then I'm the young man."

"Excuse me; I forgot you were coming. I was thinking just now. It sort of gets over me, times."

There was a gravity in Tarbox's manner which prevented Richard's smiling at this remark. The man passed his hand over his forehead confusedly — to remove some of the dust of the years, perhaps.

"Well, you see I remembered I was coming, luckily," said the engineer, in his off-hand way. "Is my room ready?"

Just then Mrs. Tarbox, a buxom housewife, came to his relief. "Time for you to go to work, Titus," said she to her husband, "and don't forget to put your coat on." Having thus dismissed him, she showed Whitcot to his apartment. "My husband gets sort of far-away some days," she apologized. "He's thinkin' about his son — our boy that we lost."

"Lately?" asked the young man, with sympathy.

"Fifteen years ago, it was. He died of consumption."

"And your only son?"

"Yes."

It may have been a desolate-looking photograph in one corner, it may have been something in the woman's manner, that prompted Whitcot's question: "Was this your son's room?"

She made answer affirmatively with her head. "He was very fond of the prospect from that window."

Reluctantly he glanced at the view. It was a long, broken stretch of woodland, ending with a glimpse of Monadnoc, which presented itself in one of the hundred different phases that a mountain shape takes, from different points. Looked at from here, and under the shadow of the grief to which he had been so abruptly introduced, it assumed a tragic, threatening look to the engineer's eye. For an instant he seemed to trace in his own person the sensations of the dying youth, as this scene faded from before him — the last of earth. Then he began to busy himself unpacking his belongings.

"It's anything but a cheerful welcome, though," he reflected. "I might as well spend my vacation in a tomb."

IX.

A DRIVE. — THE DESERT. — FOOTSTEPS.

MR. PRIDE'S open wagon carried its occupants along into a deepening solitude. After getting up one hill, it descended a little, rolling with delusive swiftness over a bridge that spanned the long-slanting splash of a brook released from the weir of the old red grist-mill hard by ; and then the horse relapsed into his habitual decrepitude as he began to plod up the next ascent. Suddenly swinging around a curve, they beheld, some distance back and huddled far down in the valley, the village, from the chimneys of which smoke was floating dreamily in the afternoon light. Another bend disclosed Monadnoc. The atmosphere was like crystal, but the mountain was far enough away to be robed in stately blue.

“ Every time I see it, it is like a fresh surprise — as if I'd never seen it before,” declared Edith.

Again, a broad screen of forest or a ridge of the highland would shut it out as completely as if it had existed only in fancy ; but the travellers found a clew to its position in the windings of the Contoo-cook, glinting blue and white reflected lights from its brown current deep in the trough of the land. Always up, always higher, toiled the wagon ; a house

was seldom passed; the surroundings became more unkempt. It arrived at a small, abandoned farmhouse, rapidly going to ruin, which was noticeable for two heart-shaped openings cut in the faded green door; and here Mr. Pride diverged from the highway, taking a smaller road that struck off at right angles into a glen more secluded than anything they had yet seen. As the horse slowly drew them up the arduous track, the three friends luxuriated in half-lit vistas of the woods and ardent perfumes that came thronging from hidden wild-flower coverts and the hearts of the gummy pines. They listened to the greenlet's fluting in the recesses of interlaced foliage, always silenced when the softly-crunching wheels came anywhere near, and resumed with tantalizing serenity as soon as they drew fairly away again. In this glen the air was cool and exhilarating; so unworn and beautiful did everything look, that it shared, seemingly, the heightened vitality which the new-comers felt in the sublimed and delicate air. The small, knotty oaks in a roadside hollow, tough as they were, threatened to snap in twain with repressed energy; the birch saplings on the yellow, sandy bank rustled with a quick, light accent befitting the thin and shifting soil in which they rooted. Farther on, a line of young beeches, thriving lustily upon the slope at the lower side of the road, thrust their flat, leafy branches under the lowest fence-rail, and laid them fairly on the road, beneath the horse's feet. They paid, thus, an unconscious homage to Edith, strewing her path with green.

"Tain't only but a short while ago I moved up to the old house," Pride explained; "end 's folks mostly go reound by t'other road, the trees kinder get it all their own way here."

Mrs. Savland felt the force of this observation, for at that moment a bough, leaning out from above, came near shearing off some of the elderly adornments of ribbon from her bonnet. Indeed, they all had to bob about a good deal, and put their heads down, to avoid untimely decapitation. But as they came out from this labyrinth on to a more open stretch, they were confronted with the chief surprise of the drive. The glen, into which they could now look freely, was full of irregular boulders and clumps of whortleberry, the central depression being marked by a grass-hung brook which had a trouty look; but the opposite acclivity showed a space of fifteen or twenty acres, covered with bare, unbroken sand.

"A real desert!" cried Edith, in amazement.

"And here in the midst of New England mountain country!" Burlen added. "I never heard of such a thing, and should hardly believe it. How did it come there, Mr. Pride? How do you explain it, I mean?"

It was really a startling sight, this great barren spot lying dry and hopeless amid an immensity of flourishing green life. A few yards from the brook it ceased abruptly, at a line on one side of which was meadow, and on the other that crawling mound of dead and inert dust, pausing for a while in its advance. Encircling it, too, at the crest of the steep was

a noble forest-growth, along which some white birches, cased in their white-satin bark, stood in exquisite contrast with the cool, dark verdure behind and the tawny glare of the Sahara patch in front.

"Don' know's it needs much explainin'," said Pride, who had grown less and less shy in proportion as he got farther from the haunts of men. "It come jest from sheer neglect. I ain't so very fearful old, but I kin remember of when that sand-heap wa' n't more'n a little teeny piece the size of this wagon."

"How long ago was that?"

"Maybe twenty year."

"Then it might have been stopped, you think?"

"Sartain. All they'd've had to do was to plant small firs on it to keep it from spreadin'; or put on some sile and grass it down."

"I can't understand such carelessness, then," said Burlen, energetically. "It was the owner's interest to save that land for pasture."

"Yep; he'd ought t' have done it," Pride admitted. "But I've got 'beout all the pastur' and mowin' I kin 'tend to, now." He gave a yawn at the mere thought.

"Oh, it was your land then, was it?" queried Burlen, taken aback.

"My uncle's. It's mine now, or anybody's that's a mind to take it. He'd ought t' have done suthin' 'beout it, that's sure." Outwardly, Pride allowed himself to appear abandoned to a disgraceful indifference; but the next moment he made a keen

observation, showing like other Yankee farmers an alert and serious intelligence under that mask of dull stupor which generations of crafty dickering have bequeathed them. "Only shows," he said, "how much harm comes from a little mite of evil, if you let it be. There's plenty of other deserts spreading in this country, a good deal more dangerous than that, when you come to look at it."

They had now advanced far enough to discover in one corner of the desert a strange, gray object about six feet high.

"What on earth is that?" inquired Mrs. Savland, peremptorily.

Burlen, who was near-sighted, said it looked like a man's figure. "No, it's not a figure; it's too motionless and too wild," he continued. "But" — here their point of view was slightly changed — "see! It *does* look strangely like a group of two people, cut in stone, — a man and a woman."

"I think it may have been the trunk of a tree once," said Edith, clearer-eyed and less fanciful. "But it's all hollow and withered now. The roots are bare, and stand out like claws."

"You've hit it!" exclaimed Pride, with a prodigious wink at the other two, designed to hint that there was nothing like the sagacity of the youthful feminine mind. "That's just what it is," he concluded. "I rec'lect the tree that stood right thar. The sand come squeezing up round it, and choked it and killed it; and since then every bit of it's dropped away and gone clean out of sight, only the stump t' you see thar."

"Still, there's a resemblance. Don't you see it, Miss Archdale?" persisted Burlen. "It looks like a man in some wild costume, holding a young girl in his arm and bidding her a long farewell."

The farmer could not refrain from a furtive smile at this touch of imagination.

"Yes, I can see something of it," Edith replied, in a self-possessed manner.

Her aunt, however, considered the suggestion highly improper. People in real life might embrace when saying farewell, but any reference to the fact was, in her view, very bad taste; especially when applied to a tree-stump.

She proceeded to change the topic by asking, with a purely disinterested and intellectual intonation: "What's the name of that mountain over there, Mr. Pride?" She made a lunge with her parasol, directed against a rounded outline off beyond the desert and the woods.

"Well, some call it Pack Monadnoc Mounting, and some call it other ways." He added with a confidential chuckle: "But the mountings 'reound here, they'll answer to 'most any name you give 'em. They stay right there, all the time."

In a few moments they came in sight of a house black with age, and overgrown with wild June-roses. "Is *that* the place?" Mrs. Savland inquired, with abstract resentment.

"No, there ain't no one lives there," said Pride, blandly. It was merely one of those deserted homes which give to many New England districts an air of

premature decay; the land around them has been wastefully exhausted and the places have been forsaken, given over to primitive wildness again before the surrounding country has even had time to form a history. Two hundred years of industry, and then death and desertion!

"*That's* our home for the summer, up there, I think," said Edith, looking towards another and larger square edifice on a grassy knoll.

"Right again," Pride ejaculated, with redoubled respect for her acumen. "Such as it is, that's the place. All I can say is, I hope you won't wish 't was another afore you git through."

Pride's house, dating from the Colonial period, was finely placed, and even in its decline looked exceedingly inviting to our friends. There were shade-trees in front, and a thick maze of wild raspberry-bushes had half-buried the fence and gate. Behind the house, on still higher ground, white-tufted bobolinks, wheeling around the scattered apple-trees that held their nests, uttered a wild carol, — half outcry and half song, — with untiring sweetness; and on the nearer side a row of slim upspringing locusts threw their ethereal leafage against the sky so lightly and so high up on the slender trunks, that they acquired a likeness to cocoa-palms, and lent a faint aroma of the Orient to the surroundings.

Meanwhile poor Richard, not finding his room at the Tarboxes' inspiring, set out for a solitary walk when the afternoon began to cool. Naturally, he

took the direction towards Pride's hill. He was tired with his tramp from Medoosic, but he fancied he should sleep better if he could hover for a few moments in Edith's neighborhood, even without seeing her. He pushed along slowly, stopping now and then to sit dejectedly under a convenient tree and ask himself, without profit, who it was that might be held responsible for his present depression. His arrival in the vicinity of the mountain, which looked so fair from the Cleft, had been very unlike what he had expected, and he was inclined to blame some one for the disappointment. When he got near the big, comfortable-looking house on the hill, it was sunset. He stood not far away, watching the day fade, until lights began to warm the windows of the dwelling here and there, and the huge barn at a little distance, beyond some elms, began to look like a square block of night-darkness dropped upon the grass. By this time, two or three cows came up the narrow road which had brought him thither. As the leader passed the raspberry-bushes at the fence, the fading glow threw upon her chestnut flank the shapes of the leaves in a rich, lace-like pattern. While Richard was looking at them, a young man in leather breeches and a blue cotton blouse made his appearance as the ostensible driver of the cows, carrying a goad; but his real occupation consisted in humming aloud to himself a song, some of the notes of which did not go quite right: —

"I'd ra-ther be with Ro-sa-bel,
A-swing-ing in the lane!"

The engineer looked once more at the house. Behind it the sky was clear, pale, and golden-green, to the height of the roof; but above that line hung a long black cloud, moving from the south. Off to the westward Monadnoc, now growing indistinct, waited for the cloud, ready to wrestle with it. There was a pervasive solemnity in the evening, which Whitcot felt without being able quite to understand it. Chilled by it in mind and body, he turned to go back to Savage's.

A few rods brought him face to face with another man. "Hullo!" he exclaimed, recognizing Rudyard. "*You're* out walking, too, eh? By-the-by, is that Pride's house, just up here?"

"You know it is," answered Rudyard, unamiably. "Have n't you just been there?"

"And the young chap driving some cows, who just passed me, must be Timothy, I suppose?" continued Richard, quite unperturbed, but eying the other narrowly.

"Think likely." Rudyard nodded.

"Thank you."

Richard went on his way. He felt more easy and companionable, after this semi-hostile encounter, and moved briskly through the gathering dusk, while the storm-cloud, now invisible, advanced with a roll of thunder upon Monadnoc. But in passing the deserted house with heart-shaped door-lights, at the junction of the roads, he thought he heard some one walking behind him,—not unpleasantly near, perhaps, but enough so to give him the notion of quietly

slipping in through the door of the house, which he observed was ajar, and waiting inside. At first he heard no more steps, but presently they began again. In another moment a form passed by, which he took to be Rudyard's, and was again lost in obscurity along the road.

"I'd rather have that villain in front of me than behind me, any time," said Richard aloud, needlessly indulging his habit of audible self-communion.

He was about to pass out again, when a hand grasped his arm from behind, in the dark of the interior. "What, in the devil's name!" he began. But a woman's voice responded. It was only a whisper, but he knew it for the voice of Ida Hiss.

"Wait! wait!" she said, eagerly. "It's dangerous. He's looking for me, and I think he's dogging you, too. Don't go out."

"Well, upon my word!" said Whitcot, in an undertone suited to the darkness, but recovering from his first astonishment. "That's a cool request! Do you expect me to pass the night in this hovel? Will you tell me what I've got to do with you and with this unpleasant Mr. Rudyard, that should make me hesitate to walk about after dark if I choose to? If anybody is to be intimidated on this occasion, I rather think it won't be myself." Though his tone was cool, the elaborate length of this speech betrayed that he was excited.

"Well, do as you like," whispered the girl, who had removed her hand. "I don't want you to get into trouble. That's all."

Whitcot's curiosity began to revive. "Now I think of it," he asked, "what has Timothy Pride got to do with this extraordinary mess that you all seem to be in? I saw him just now, up the road."

"Hush!" answered the girl, who, unseen in the darkness, spoke with a direct earnestness she had not shown during their odd conversation at the hotel. "Rudyard is spying on him, too."

"That's what I suspected," said the engineer, becoming disgusted with his position, as soon as his curiosity was satisfied. "As far as I'm concerned, though, you can count me out. If Rudyard says a word to me, we shall come to an understanding very promptly, I promise you."

Hereupon he slipped out from the cottage again and started towards the village once more, with a short, internal laugh of scorn. If it had not been so peculiarly silent and lonely up here, he assured himself, he would never have taken the ridiculous precaution of stepping into such a doubtful shelter and meeting so very dubious a fellow-hider there.

His sense of security did not last long. Once more the footsteps from behind fell upon his ear, this time fainter and more cautious. Rudyard had apparently missed him, waited in concealment, and was again on his track. Whitcot was soon able to verify this guess; for as he reached a rise in the road and looked back, straining to discover something, a flash of lightning from the impending storm lit up the part he had just traversed. Full in the glare, standing still as if afraid that the light would be-

tray him, Ruydard was revealed, not twenty yards away.

Whitcot's first impulse was to hail him and insist upon an explanation of his singular conduct. But this would perhaps lead to a useless quarrel, or at best would intimate some apprehension on his part. "Besides, how do I know that he is n't an incipient maniac?" he asked himself. Wheeling around, therefore, he prosecuted his walk more rapidly.

Try as he would, he could not prevent that cold-burning glance, which the mechanic had given him at dinner, from coming out of the dark and facing him. A quick step, a vigorous exercise of the body, he felt sure would dissipate this hallucination. Rain began to fall, and he began to run; the pattering drops drowning the sound of his footfalls.

He was glad to arrive at the Tarboxes', and quite satisfied with his room, despite its associations. His supper of hot biscuit, mince-pie, cheese, and strong tea was not the best preparation for sleep, but he was so tired that he slept deeply. Nevertheless he dreamed heavily that night, and in his dreams he was pursued, — sometimes by Rudyard, but quite as often by Ida Hiss, and always with the same effect of terror.

X.

WHISPERINGS IN THE RAIN.

THE storm which began on the night of the arrival at Pride's lasted several days.

Even on that evening the searching damp of the rain so filled the house that Mrs. Pride — a nervous, knotty little woman, all bone and sinew, but with an expression of determined cheerfulness carved upon the stiff muscles of her face — insisted on lighting a wood-fire on the hearth of the parlor assigned to Mrs. Savland and her niece. Timothy came in with an armful of brush, smiling and awkward; but his cheeks were too ruddy with health to show the blush that was pricking him under the skin. The brush was followed by a miscellany of sticks, — dead apple-boughs picked up from a neglected orchard near at hand, bits of maple, locust, and ash, with one shining piece of birch and a couple of stout oak-logs. The fireplace was ample enough to hold them all. But as the first sparks flew up the chimney, a loud throbbing and whirring sound came through the wall; and strange squeaks and sharp notes of distress rose, muffled, somewhere within the brickwork.

“Oh, what is that?” cried Edith, getting up from the little corner-sofa where she had been watching the fire-building. She was really alarmed, and

Burlen felt a sweet, hidden pleasure at her turning first to him.

Mrs. Savland, in a high-backed rocking-chair that curved above her like the shrine of some weather-beaten image, lifted her feet well up, and uttered a pathetic cry of "Mice!"

Bashful Timothy smiled outright in broad derision; but his mother, from the kitchen-door, exclaimed, pacifyingly: "The swifts! It's so long, you see, there hain't been no fire in that chimbley. Did n't you never hear 'em gibbing like that, young lady?" she said, referring to Edith.

"Gibbing?" queried Edith, not understanding that Mrs. Pride had a way of catching at words that suited her fancy, whether obsolete, accepted, or still uncreated.

"Yes," said the woman; "skrivverting and squeaking when they're frightened. It's birds, you know."

"Chimney-swallows," said Burlen. "That's it."

Mrs. Savland's feet came down, on the instant: she looked as if she would have denied stoutly that she had ever lifted them.

"Oh, yes, *now* I see!" said Edith, aglow with pleasure. "We never had them, at home." There was an almost childish glee about the young girl, as she threw back one hand to emphasize her sudden perception, and let her head sink for an instant towards her shoulder. Timothy ceased grinning and fell into hushed wonder, as he contemplated her. But presently an unlooked-for solicitude shad-

owed her happy face. "What will become of the poor creatures, now that we've driven them out into the storm?" she asked sadly, looking around at the rest.

Then it was Burlen's turn to wonder. He thought how strange it is that one beautiful woman can look beautiful in so many different ways.

But as the first flames jagged up through the brush, scathing the wood, then vanished, and reappeared in bodiless brightness above it, to be lost in the blackness of the chimney-throat, the little birds grew still and were forgotten. The blended flames danced faster about the pile, and the mingled fragrance of the various woods stole out into the long, spacious room. Inspired by the glow and cheer, Burlen made a sally into the rainy night with Timothy, and came back with some short branches of spruce, which — glittering and hissing with the illuminated drops — he flung upon the blaze. There was a gathering of soft smoke, a sudden fresh spout of flame, with much fiery snapping of the green wood; after which, the branches lay subdued on the burning logs, with their fringes turned to red-hot, scintillating points. And then these faded, too, dropping into the deep-red embers below.

The morning broke in showers, or rather came into sight already shattered into hopeless drizzle; so that the fire was continued. Once the sun shot out its rays, and there was a promise of clearing. Then delicate, elusive sounds began, so faint that it was hard to tell whether they arose within the room or

without; but soon they defined themselves as the rustle of fresh drops on the trees, and then the steady, quiet downpour recommenced. The two young people with whom we are concerned, however, did not find their imprisonment very hard to bear, the drowsy purring of the fire gave such a sense of comfort. There may have been other reasons for their contentment. Yes, surely; there was the amusement afforded by exploring the quaintness of the old house.

It retained the dignity of the days when it was built; it was planned commodiously, for large families and hearty living. With fewer marked inequalities now, perhaps, than at that period, New England country life has yet shrunk since the decline of farming prosperity; and the Prides illustrated this shrinkage by occupying only a part of the roomy old mansion. What had once been a smooth-floored dining-hall — where many a gay reel had been shuffled through, and many a jovial husking-party or winter's night frolic had been held before a roaring hearth, with cider and home-brewed ale, apples, butternuts, and pop-corn — was now used as the kitchen; the kitchen proper, with its enormous chimney-place and rusty crane, being left empty and cold, under a leaking roof. But Mrs. Pride kept the present kitchen clean and shining, with shelves full of pans, and of plates among which were some that boasted the blue blood of the Mandarins. In the planked ceiling were hooks on which strings of dried apples would be hung in autumn, and a big spinning-

wheel occupied one corner, at which the housewife spun miles of yarn that she afterwards, at odd times and even, knitted into stockings for Timothy and her husband, and for various male relatives who had migrated to the cities. "Guess they would n't walk very easy through this mundacious life without 'em," the old woman observed in her deluded pride; not knowing how carefully this foot-gear was laid away and never worn after reaching her sophisticated city kinsfolk.

The guests' parlor was lined with a blue and buff wall-paper, — an early work of the present century, — depicting Washington's triumphal entry into New York, which showed how very literally history repeats itself; for at every few feet along the sides of the room, General Washington came cantering into view on his mettlesome roan steed in precisely the same posture as at his first appearance, with his cocked hat held at exactly the same angle in his hand, and accompanied by the identical blue and buff troops who supported him at the entrance-door. I grieve to say that the Continentals suffered occasionally by these historic transitions, the previous stratum of incident sometimes lapping over and cutting off their noses in the most unfeeling manner. Even the General did not escape: one of the window frames deprived the roan charger of his tail and one leg. Edith preferred the garret, where there were a few remains of handsome furniture, — bits of old costume in an ancient press, and a supply of leather, with shoe-making tools, still used by Pride in domes-

tic cobblery. The peculiarity of the cellar was that it contained a nest of that sociable kind of snake, the house-adder, — spotted reptiles whom Mrs. Pride called “checkered-adda’s,” — who had taken up their residence there while the house had been vacant, and now declined to move. Mrs. Savland was in constant dread of being devoured by one of these small, thin creatures, until assured that they had a constitutional dislike for parlors and bed-rooms, being abandoned to a low taste for cellar-walls.

Old things interest young people because of their own youth ; curious things because of their vivacious curiosity. I don’t think Miss Edith Archdale and Mr. Robert Burlen would have found the antiquated house so entertaining if they had been older. I am sure they would not, if either of them had inspected it alone. And because they were young and together, other sources of agreeable occupation were discovered.

During this sulky weather Monadnoc was out of sight. The strong, watchful mountain, like a guardian above the surrounding country, had seen the storm coming from afar ; had met and grappled with it ; and now it was shrouded in the dense mist of the conflict.

Yet Burlen was sensibly affected by the fact that it was near him. Since coming to this place he had been full of a new buoyancy, which appeared to grow out of the knowledge that he was on high ground. It was more than that. A new phase in his life had begun. Something had been achieved : he was no

longer a student simply, but had risen to a higher plane. From it he could see farther than he had ever seen before, and his painful past lay in a deep, overshadowed lowland whither he was never, he felt, to return. On the night of coming to Pride's, a vision of the mountain had risen upon him in his sleep, and a voice had rolled in organ-tones upon his ear: "It stands above all, like Fate or Providence, and takes no share in human vicissitude. It will not help us unless we help ourselves. But if we do that, its dumb example, its skyward striving, will lift us up — and to what heights!"

As for Edith, she also underwent some change of mood. Men have definite aims and ambitions, which are aided, modified, or ruined by some woman on whom they have fixed their hopes. Women likewise let the current of their lives take its trend from some one man. There is this difference between them, — that the man intrusts his fixed purpose to the woman, giving her a despotic power over it for help or harm; while she waits for him to define her purpose for her, and then changes it as often as she pleases. Edith was now waiting. She had a fine woman's instinct for reading the points on her own compass by the needle of a true man's character; but it was a new thing for her to be shut up, as now, with a young enthusiast like Burlen, whom she had always taken seriously. She regarded him more seriously, with a closer attention than ever. There need be nothing very personal, she thought, about this interest. She said to herself that she would "study" Burlen; and

that convenient paraphrase set her mind at rest. Still, this expectant rest was deceptive.

At first she did not seem to have a great deal of leisure for his society. She displayed a fitful energy in showing Mrs. Pride how to cook, under the guise of practising; she was busy in her own room; she must write to her father. Mrs. Savland also opened a portable bureau of correspondence, and began to whiten the air with useless letters, — a mode she had of employing dull days. But she felt the mountain-air. A mischievous spirit of sleep beset her, tripped her pen, and began disrespectfully to make her head nod; so that she was forced to retire and seek a systematic nap. Edith went with her, to see that she was comfortable; leaving the clerical candidate alone in the parlor. He had brought a book or two there, but when Edith disappeared he lost his interest in these, and going to the window looked out at the rain. Watching the dim gray lights of the abbreviated vistas seen through the panes, he idly occupied himself with the dull sparkle of the driving goutts as they fell, and the gush of thin water-jets from the leaf-points of lilac and raspberry that formed a hundred miniature gargoyles. The beads of moisture stood so thick and white upon a field of seeded grass across the road that it looked as if it were in flower. Suddenly a robin, tired of waiting for fair weather to return, sent his long note out into the rain on a venture, to see if that would hasten matters. But beyond this there was no sound other than a splash and dull beat of drops, mingling in the low, continu-

ous, droning hum of the showers. Burlen listened to it as if it could tell him something that he wished to hear.

All at once Edith came demurely back from her aunt's room, with some fancy-work and a paper novel. She sat down by the fire. Not having heard her enter, he was surprised by the rustling of the pages, and immediately turned around. But as she appeared intent on the book, he again fixed his eyes on the wet scene without. After a moment, laying her book and work aside, she rose and tried to rearrange the fire with the tongs. This brought him across the room.

"Let me do that," he said. Noticing that she did not at once resume the book, he added, experimentally, giving a final prod to the fire: "A novel is just the thing for this weather. You're fortunate to have a fresh one."

"It does n't interest me," she returned, with that disdainful coolness which, in her, seldom offended. Burlen foolishly failed to see that if the novel did n't interest her, he might. He began to move away. "What were those books I saw you so busy at, a little while ago?" she asked.

"Oh, some of my mill-wheels. Theological things."

Edith brightened. "There might be some satisfaction in those," she said, with a somewhat sudden and remarkable zest for serious reading.

"Would you like to see them?" He was delighted, — not at her showing interest in the books

because they were his, but at the discovery that he could satisfy a wish of hers. He brought one of the volumes and drew a chair to the hearth-stone. "This," he said, "I think would interest you most. It's a book of monkish legends."

"Am I so very monkish?" she asked, with a gay laugh.

"Monkish?" he repeated, in surprise. "Oh, I see." And he passed over the small jest so easily that Edith was crushed by a sense of having been rather frivolous. "The reason I think you'll like them is, they're odd and full of fancy. Some of course are absurd, but now and then — here's one, for instance, I was reading just before you left the room;" he opened at the page; "and I was going to tell you a strange coincidence. The story is told in the *Monasticon Hibernicum* by an old writer named Mervin Archdall. Don't you see? — that's probably the same name as Archdale. I should n't wonder if your father's family were connected with this old chronicler."

"How curious! Well, tell me the legend, do. Is it a good one?"

"It may n't strike you as it does me," he said, fearing that she might laugh at him again if he grew too much in earnest. "But I find a good symbolism in it. It's about St. Patrick's staff, — it was holy, and had miraculous powers, you know. He got it from an ascetic living on an island in the Tyrrhene Sea. In that island the saint found some men in the bloom of youth, and others aged and decrepit;

but the singular part of it is that the old men were the sons of those who appeared so young. Isn't that suggestive?"

"It's very fantastic," said Edith, by no means inclined to laugh. "I think it *is* suggestive, too. But tell me what you make of it?"

He looked at her an instant, and then his gaze went far off. He was absorbed in his own thoughts. "I could almost write a sermon on a thing like that!" he burst out, suddenly; once more facing her. "The explanation given for the fable is, that these fathers had been good men and served Christ. One night he visited them in the guise of a pilgrim stranger, and when he left them in the morning he gave them a blessing that clothed them in enduring youthfulness. Their sons, who were then young, grew to be old and wrinkled; but *they*, on the contrary, kept their young looks. Well, that's merely a symbol of what we often see, — children prematurely aging in graceless modes of life, while their fathers and mothers seem to remain beautiful, because of their right living and because they're faithful to high trusts."

"Why, that's a lovely thought," the girl responded, with a pleasurable sigh. "And I don't believe I should ever have got it out of such a story, by myself."

"There's another way of looking at it, too," he went on, ardently. "We can say that the new generation, the young, can command the old, if they serve God well. For if we use our knowledge wisely,

getting new spiritual meanings out of what has gone before, the past no longer controls us as a parent, but we control it as we would a child. Sometimes I think that we who are the youngest almost *make* the past, which seems so much older than we. We at any rate bring it to the light; and our larger and purer religious conceptions give it a new existence."

"You are turning me all around," said Edith, in pretty distress.

"Well, after all, that notion may be too fanciful," he confessed; and this ready yielding to her instinct was very agreeable to her. But she noted well the mounting color in his face and that warm, stirring light which always filled the rich brown of his eyes when he was roused. "Here—here would be the main issue of the sermon," he continued, repeating his words in the haste with which he rushed on to his idea—"the sermon—if I were to make one. This is the idea to be got out of it: that the relations in life which seem established and unchangeable—and in mere physical fact are unchangeable—do not always correspond exactly to the spiritual relations. Authority is chiefly vested in those who appear to be the older and more venerable, but often it is the seemingly young who exercise a control in spiritual progress. When new truths are to be unfolded it is the beardless men who must take the lead, and act as parents to the patriarchs. That's an important principle; and you see how picturesquely I could illustrate it by this old legend, don't you? Then I should make a great climax by bringing this home

to the present generation, and asking whether we shall be like those young men who had grown old, or like the old men who were everlastingly youthful."

He ended with a full gaze into those large, proud, quiet eyes that were fixed upon him. He sought a response to his own enthusiasm; and it did not fail him.

"Oh, Mr. Burlen, write it! Write it! I see now what you could do with such a theme. It was good of you to tell me all this. But you must tell others! Can't you preach that for your first sermon here — here at Savage's?" (She was already falling unconsciously into that way of his, of repeating words when she grew interested.)

"If you think so," said he, rising and pacing about with his head bent to meet the rush of motives, thoughts, and hopes that came upon him like a blast. "If *you* think so!" There was the slightest pressure of the voice on that now precious pronoun. "Of course my text would not be this superstitious tale, but then I could use it. In connection with that, there is the tradition of the saint having drawn together by his miraculous staff all the venomous creatures there were in Ireland, bringing them to the top of a mountain, from which he threw them into the sea."

"Oh, yes! I've heard that."

Burlen came back and leaned his elbow on the old yellowish mantle-piece, his face taking on something of a visionary quality as he proceeded: "I

don't know how to convey to you what I've felt in coming up here; but there seems to be a positive effect on my life in the ascent to this spot so much farther up towards the sky. It seems to be lifting me to the level of my life-work. Mountains are places fit for solitude and thought and prayer, — places to work deeds in less miraculous than that doubtful one of St. Patrick's, but just as useful; more so. It would at least be a good thing to begin one's career in these high places." He gave a half-smile. "Now I could connect all that I've been saying with this idea about mountains — oh, it would develop many fine meanings! — and reach the people's hearts by making it all centre around their own *Monadnoc*."

Again he looked at her for some confirmatory sign; as if his plans, even his thoughts, were not complete without her judgment. This time the reply was a silent approval: no words were needed.

After a moment's pause, Edith seemed about to say something more, which should continue the strain into which they had passed. She was on the verge of that momentous act for a young woman, — the revealing to a man who may be her lover some hidden capacity of her nature, some unexplored recess into which the glancing lights of casual intercourse have thrown no certain ray.

The shadowy lines on an azalea are merely a more sensitive white; and so, though this exquisite girl's outward seeming did not change describably, Bur-len detected in her expression a subtle difference,

as of a gentle stir rising from depths which he had believed belonged to her.

But the utterance did not come.

Fresh from her brief sleep, Mrs. Savland at this juncture floated into the room. She came serene, but her first glance at the two young people threw her into commotion. With masterly swiftness she concentrated her attention on the only resource for effecting a diversion, and for relieving the embarrassment she knew she had caused. She flew forward, she swooped, she bent over and picked up something from the hearth. "Edith, what has happened to your book?" she sternly demanded, holding up to sight the charred corners of the paper novel, which had slipped from her niece's lap without being observed.

Edith was not deceived by her aunt's agitation on behalf of the neglected author. She knew that Mrs. Savland had observed everything. In fact, the elder lady had discovered upon the two young faces a still but slightly tremulous light, which she was aware could not proceed from the crumbling fire alone; and in that light she had read things of which Edith herself was as yet only dimly conscious.

"Mr. Burlen," continued Aunt Grace, "if you are going to your room, could you get us some wood for our fire, first? I don't think Timothy is about."

Her niece listened to this speech with a disapproval which Mrs. Savland saw clearly enough, but calmly disregarded. Burlen, however, received her light insolence in the simplest way; brought a few

birch-sticks, saying they were the best he could find ; and then withdrew.

Edith took up her fancy-work, without further noticing Aunt Grace's presence ; and Mrs. Savland went to the writing-table, where her pen began to squeak in an unconcerned manner. The rain outside went on whispering. To the elder woman its tone was ominous. She had meant to play Whitcot to the best of her ability against Burlen, until Ravling should get into the field again. But the storm had prevented Whitcot's effecting a junction with her, so to speak ; and she had thus been deprived of even this weak auxiliary. Meanwhile the enemy — Burlen — was making rapid headway, and must be checked. Perhaps she could divert his attention by deploying another young woman. She laid down her pen.

"I've been thinking, Edith dear, that we shall be rather too solitary up here, — especially in bad weather. Don't you feel it?"

Edith said, coldly, that she had not felt it.

"No, I dare say not yet ; you have been so *absorbed*." After pausing a second or so, to let the sting work in, Mrs. Savland glided on, innocently : "But if you're going to be a good deal taken up by various interests, it's all the more reason why I should have two companions to depend on, instead of one. What do you think of getting Viola Welsted to leave Willowbridge at once and come to make us a visit now?"

"Let's write to her by all means," answered

Edith with charming acquiescence ; seeing through her aunt's feeble wiles without effort.

So she sat down, and with great readiness played *primo* to her aunt's *secondo*, in a little epistolary duet.

The rain went on whispering, day and night. And what did it say to the young girl's heart? Was it not an apt accompaniment to moods half plaintive, yet sweet and refreshing like itself? She had begun to wonder at the gently awakening influence that Burlen exerted over her. The daughter of a learned divine who had taught religion as many years as she had lived, why had she always felt the most of her father's doings and thinkings to be parts of a system with which she had little concern, when this comparatively untrained graduate, entering on the same field, could so fire her with enthusiasm to follow? Was there really all this difference between the sympathy of youth and the sympathy of age? Perhaps it had something to do with what Burlen had been saying about youth and age. In short, inquiring thoughts and dim, sweet premonitions that she could not measure were borne in upon her mind as the soft, persistent throbbings of the shower fell upon her hearing and mingled with her pulse-beats.

The restless rain had something to say to Burlen as well, though it was only an echo of what was in his own mind. After Mrs. Savland's hint that the fire in the historical parlor was an exclusive property, he kept pretty closely to his own room. He suffered intensely from any slight of this kind ; but

he kept his annoyance to himself. Nevertheless it aided in importing into the refrain of the rainfall many notes of doubt and gloom, — gloom, when he thought of his lost sister and the connection which, through her, might even now exist between himself and some unutterable shame; doubt, when he wondered whether a woman bred very differently from himself, and with no dreary secrets in her heart, could ever fuse her life happily with his.

At last, late one afternoon, the rain and fog passed off. The sun, just disappearing, flung its light out in that peculiar wan glare which does not fill the whole atmosphere, but strikes hillsides and house-tops here and there, giving them a brief, dazzling distinctness as of some bright apparition. The patches of pine and the heavier woods of the valley lay drenched and dark, like deep shadows in the scene. But the pale orange splendor irradiated as if with some strange chemical flame a large elm between the house and barn, which had the peculiarity of a great side-bough curving out from the trunk and then running up so high and straight that it gave the whole tree a rude likeness to a harp. The leaves were still shining with the wet; the hollow drilling of a woodpecker was heard among the upper branches, and then Burlen saw the black and white bird walking vertically up the trunk while uttering a dank, reedy piping, which seemed to have imbibed the quality of the recent rain. Monadnoc stood out clear and calm in the west; full of a deep blue color that gave it the character of a

precious stone. Small birds chirped excitedly, dashing by the harp-shaped elm with slim gray breasts glowing in the watery radiance. The swallows came crowding back to the fireless chimney. And restless-winged hopes came back to Burlen.

XI.

A CHILD OF NIGHT.

WHILE the rain had been murmuring its vague responses to the reveries of Edith and Burren, up on the hill, that empty house at the cross-roads, with its two quaint heart-shaped openings in the door, — that vacated residence whereof we have already taken notice, which had fallen many degrees below the “To Let” stage, — became the scene of a very peculiar interview.

Timothy Pride and Ida Hiss had met there, unknown to any one. Those odd apertures in the door, which had once helped to brighten the little home within, now looked like crude mementoes of some exiled pair, who in going hence had left the imprint of their wedded love behind them. But through them the cold wind rushed, and played mockingly around the two young persons who had come to a rendezvous in the desolate interior, where the watery downpour dripped upon the decaying floors and made such grotesquely sorrowful sounds about the ruined eaves.

“Ugh! It’s terribly cold here,” ejaculated Ida, drawing closer around her a coarse, brown cloak which covered her down to the bottom of her short skirts.

"I suppose you'd like me to put my arm around you, to keep the cold out, hey? Or mebbe dance a jig with you?" was Timothy's boorish response, made in a tone that was not alarming nor indicative of impertinence, but showing that he was desirous to satisfy a rough kind of psychological curiosity.

"Why do you always say such bold, rude things to me?" asked the girl, with an air of hurt self-respect that made him rather sorry for his remark. Yet her eyes danced in a way that led him to believe she was amused and satisfied. "Do you think I'm the kind of girl to like it?"

"I don't know what kind you mean, nor what kind of girl you are, nor what you like, any way," complained Timothy. "I wish you would n't always be so queer, and not let a fellow know what you're after."

"But supposing I don't know, myself, what I'm after?"

"Then you ought n't to fool with other folks," said the boy, sullenly. "I don't see but what you was well enough off before I knew you; and so was I. There's Rudyard would bet his eye-teeth on yo', and Ann Fernlow is good enough for me. Mother expects me to go courtin' her, and so does Ann's mother, herself. 'Sides, she cares a sight more about me'n you do."

"Do you think so?" returned Ida, sneering. Then her whole mien changed abruptly; and, throwing aside her cloak, she thrust her face forward, exclaiming ardently: "You don't know! You don't

know! Ah, Timothy Pride, how many girls would brave what I do, to meet you in a lonely place like this? Would Ann Fernlow come out here, I sh'd like to know? Why is n't she here now, then, 'stead of me? And then there's Rudyard besides, almost ready to murder me if he knew. I think it's *you* that's queer! There ain't many men that would be blind and deaf and dumb and — everything, after I'd done so much."

Without giving him time to recover from this tirade, the girl retreated to a corner of the room; and there, the anger of the previous moment subdued, she quenched her feelings with tears and stood sobbing.

"Grim thunder!" muttered Timothy, who had his mother's gift for phrases. "I s'pose I *am* pootty consid'able of a fool; 'specially 'beout gals. How come you to take a fancy to such a big fool as me, any way?" he demanded, raising his voice as if indignant at her lack of discrimination in this respect.

She made no response, but continued leaning against a tenant-post of the old house, sobbing.

Timothy drew nearer. "Now please don't take on like that," he besought her, penitently. "Tell me something I can do to make you feel better, Ida," he went on, approaching still nearer and laying one of his rosy-brown hands on her cloaked shoulder.

She stopped sobbing, and hearkened to the changed, tender voice in which he addressed her. To her restless nature, dwelling in an atmosphere of

sultry passion, this tone seemed like a fresh breeze blowing down from clover-pastures. "Keep your hand there," she said, softly. "But you mustn't put your arm round me, as you said just a minute ago."

There was something commanding in her tone, which caused Timothy to take even his hand away. He perceived now, for the first time, that he was dealing with a wild nature that none the less had compulsory laws of its own, and that he had done her wrong by his previous trifling tone. An impetuous desire seized him to run a fresh risk; to approach her in a more serious way.

"What!" he exclaimed, recklessly, yet with a more respectful manner than hitherto. "Don't you want me to make love to you? Perhaps you think I don't know how. Well, I swan it's so. I never made love to any one yet. But I guess I could if I tried."

The girl's tears had been unbidden, but they were quite dried now. She looked at him with keen humor, and then broke into a hearty laugh, holding her hands on her hips.

"Try it," she said, abruptly. "But I tell you beforehand that perhaps I sha'n't listen to what you say, at all."

"Oh, rough it!" he exclaimed. "Don't you know I can't talk, if you start like that? It's like tryin' to whistle, when you're laughin'. You see, you take all the limber out of me, and make me feel as dry as old harness-leather."

"Don't tell me it's me that's throwing cold water on you," she returned; "it comes in through the roof." She pointed to the ragged little peep-holes which the sky had made for itself through that covering. "But then perhaps you had n't better go on, anyhow. Don't you know your mother would be angry if you made love to me?"

"I don't care if she is," he declared, not perceiving her satire. "But what's the good of my marryin' you, when you come to look at it?"

"Hush!" She gave this single syllable of scorn, before retorting: "That's for you to find out — what good it is!" She tapped one foot on the floor, with several rapid beats, and added: "And who said I'd ever marry *you*? You talk as if you could settle it in a minute."

The boy had a healthy instinct that this clandestine playing with fire was outside of the normal limits of his life; yet the interest in him which Ida had for a long time shown was flattering. He was fascinated by her; yet, while half giving up to her spell, a timid recoil would constantly draw him away, — as a bold swimmer in the sea, feeling sudden currents of cold, thinks of drowning, and strikes out in haste for the shore. "I won't ask you to marry me, nuther," he announced firmly, "until I've thought onto it some more. I don't believe you'd do it if I did ask. Rudyard would n't like it."

"Rudyard?" echoed the girl, sarcastically. "Who cares for him? Is he my master? I never promised him anything. I ain't bound to him, and

don't mean to have anything to do with him, unless I please. See!" She caught up a breadth of her dress, as she spoke. "I'd tear him up just like that, if I chose." And, taking the stuff firmly in both hands, she rent it without compunction.

"If you could," put in Timothy, pretending not to be impressed, though secretly very much so; "Rudyard ain't to be torn as easy as women's clothes. If it was n't for him, though, I —"

"What?" asked Ida, carelessly.

"Now tell me," he inquired methodically, looking out of the corners of his eyes as if calculating chances; "would you marry me, if I asked you?"

"I sha'n't tell you. You'll have to ask me first."

"Well, then," he said, turning, and speaking with an intensity that surprised himself, "will you marry me?"

"Yes," said Ida, quietly.

Timothy was rather stunned. "Where should we go to?" he asked, hesitatingly; feeling that, once bound, they would stand completely alone.

"Wherever you like," she answered, in a docile tone.

"Have n't you any folks?" he questioned. "Where's your real true home?"

The girl's head drooped: she had no answer. A shiver passed through Timothy. Ida became instinctively aware of it, lifted her face again, and came swiftly towards him. "*You* would make me a home," she said, earnestly. "I have n't any. I can't tell you where I came from. But what does

that matter? If you came straight out of the woods, and I had never seen you before, I should like you just as much as I do now. More, perhaps!" she ended, with a touch of her natural sauciness: at which the young fellow breathed freer.

An idea occurred to him, which had its charm. "Are you a gypsy, Ida?" he asked. "I knew a little gypsy girl once—long ago, when I was a shaver. They came through here more, those times. She was a gay piece; she had a dark skin, too, like yours. I could show you the old road, over by the desert, where the gypsy tent was. It's hidden in the woods, most of the way from here to Canada; and they came in a wagon with a white top." Timothy was not romancing. Gypsies are found in the most unexpected localities, by those who keep their eyes open; and the existence of a well-known tribe of them in New Hampshire, earlier in the present century, is attested by an anecdote in the memoirs of Daniel Webster.

Timothy's eyes glowed, as he recalled that memory of the Romany child, and Ida was quick to take advantage of it. "Perhaps I'm that same little gypsy girl," she cried, gaily, "grown up to be a woman! And now I've come back, you see."

"That ain't so," he returned, a shadow descending upon his face. "I know it ain't so."

"Oh, you tire me all out," sighed Ida, "with your changings and choosings. I'm afraid you won't make me a very good husband."

"I ain't a-going to try," Timothy answered doggedly. "I did n't promise. I only asked you."

"All right," she said; "I don't want to talk to you any more to-day. You must go home, now. It's time."

He hesitated; disliking to be ordered, and also repenting of his apparent want of gallantry.

"Go!" she reiterated, gloomily. "I must walk back to Savage's; and, before I start, you'll have to be out of the way."

"When am I going to see you again?" he inquired, wistfully.

"How can I tell?" Ida assumed a tone of indifference. "Perhaps you won't ever see me again. This storm's going away soon, but it'll come back. If I go after it, I sha'n't come back. I know the paths in the woods, and the woods know me. Maybe I shall turn gypsy."

"I'd almost like to do that myself," said the foolish youth. "Wait till I have time to think. You don't know but I'll go with you."

"You have n't got grit enough," she returned scornfully. Yet there was a relenting accent in her voice.

"Well, good-by!" he exclaimed abruptly.

"Good-by, harness-leather. Old harness-leather!" she cried.

He went out awkwardly, and the door closed behind him. She stood looking at it. How empty and wretched those two little mimic hearts cut in the woodwork looked now! She clasped her hands convulsively, the fingers straining at each other. She was mortified; but, besides that, she felt herself

abandoned to a hopeless solitude, unless she could hold the innocent-minded young woodsman who had just left her, in the bonds of that admiration which he had at times confessed. From such solitude there could be no escape, save by some rough downward path along which Rudyard would most probably be her unwelcome guide. His uncouth, savage nature was but too well in accord with the slumbering wildness in herself to make her willing to yield to such a fate. In her instinctive, inarticulate way she knew that when once she had surrendered to him, his irreverent mastery would enclose her life as in an iron cage. What would happen to her then, with this burning, bursting desire that lay forever tossing at the bottom of her heart for some sweeter, purer, and higher existence than she had ever known? She clung to the thought of Timothy — ludicrous though it may appear to sophisticated observers — as her only chance of being raised to a happier and truer way of life. His clean and supple youth, his unspoiled freshness, attracted her overpoweringly. She would have been willing to toil and suffer long as life should last, for such a man. He represented to her, in fine, her aspiration.

Yet to her he was as far away as Edith was from Burlen, or the tip of Monadnoc from any one who should stand gazing at it from the Cleft. Poor Ida's striving must of course impress persons of fastidious position and settled antecedents as a matter hardly deserving of notice; at the least, very unpleasant to contemplate. But to her it was something quite

different. Who can say what burden it was that bore the girl down in her effort to rise from that quagmire of wrong and woe into which she had sunk? Possibly the riddle of her strivings and her failures had been propounded long before her birth, under conditions for which she was not responsible. Beings like her cross our path at times, making us reflect that the same life-bearing current which in them goes so darkly on its way and ends in abysses so abhorred, is connected with the tide of thought and feeling in the most punctilious and irreproachable of us, by numberless unseen ducts, which are no less real for being unnoticed.

Such persons are creatures of mystery. To learn their parentage tells us little. They are the children of night and antiquity, reproducing always freshly what is older than the earth.

XII.

WHITCOT BEGINS ENGINEERING.

TO a young professional man without employment it is consoling to gather about him a few tokens of his craft, so that by looking at them he may convince himself that he has really entered on a career.

Accordingly Whitcot, on the rainy morning after his singular experience in returning from Pride's, took out of his trunk his box of instruments, some sheets of paper and a drawing-board, several elaborately technical pamphlets printed from discourses read by successful engineers before meetings of other less successful engineers, and a formidable row of thick volumes bound in red and bearing the potent name of Ramsey. Then, with the conscious rectitude of a mind that has been well employed, he betook himself to a novel by the elder Dumas, and measured its innumerable paragraphs by means of cigarettes smoked in regular succession; balancing the tobacco and the fiction with great nicety. This interesting experiment in the relative strength of materials he continued through nearly the whole of that day, with short intermissions for eating. But when he found the inclement weather settling itself comfortably for a prolonged stay, he was obliged to

throw himself on the native resources of the country. He had almost given this up, as a bad job, and was considering the advisability of flying to the seashore, when something transpired which gave him new reasons for staying.

Finding Savage's Hotel to be the centre of public life in the place, he dropped in there every day to read the newspapers; found Major Brown, Waddy, and Breck congregated there at certain hours; and, having ingratiated himself by patronizing the bar, fell into conversation with those worthies. Bad weather and ennui had reduced his pride, and rendered him more companionable than on the day of his arrival. His docility was rewarded by the Major with unlimited gossip about the entire population of the neighborhood. By and by it appeared that a like courtesy was expected of him as regarded his friends on the hill; whereupon Whitcot talked of them at some length without telling anything that he did n't want to.

"That Mr. Burlen's goin' to preach here for the Second Church, ain't he?" Breck asked of Serious.

"Yep," said the landlord, confirmatively.

"Do you think he's likely to get the position?" Richard inquired. He hoped Burlen would, for it seemed to him improbable that Edith would consent to share the obscure life of a minister at Savage's.

"Likely enough," Serious replied. "The s'ciety ain't in no hurry to choose, though."

"Why not?"

"Well, we've got along for a year without a set-

tled minister, and like it pootty well. You see we get 'em on trial for nothin'; and then it's kind o' spicy, havin' different ones all the time. Real spicy, 't is." Serious's eyes twinkled with sharp commercial satisfaction.

Whitcot learned, further, that the Second Church was Congregational, because the Unitarians in the original church had been so strong as to capture it and drive out the Orthodox members; also, that the last settled minister of the "Second" had retired because of some financial operations which — as the local newspaper had said at the time — "impaired his usefulness in the pulpit." He had, in fact, organized a bank, and induced people to deposit largely in it; after which the bank failed and the minister was found to have avoided responsibility, so that he could not be prosecuted. "But, some way or another," Waddy explained, as if he could n't imagine in what way, "his wife turned out to own his house, and had a lot of other proputtty settled on her."

"Pretty bad work for a minister to be engaged in," observed Whitcot, with an air of reluctant justice.

"Yes," said the Major, "he was rayther *too* smart to be a preacher." Then all the men laughed, unable to repress their sneaking admiration for the skill with which an innocent-seeming expounder of the gospel had taken in the community.

"Fact is," put in Breck, screwing his earnest eye anxiously around, to fix it on Major Brown, "these pulpit-pounders, now-a-days, have got heaven down

so fine, they pay a little more 'tention than they'd ought to to some other things."

Though not very sensitive on this subject, Whitcot was rather startled at the tone of the discussion, and congratulated himself that he was not in Burlen's shoes, — a candidate for a sacred office among people so lightly burdened with reverence for it.

The Major had apparently been turning something over in his mind. "Burlen?" he reflected; audibly. "Where've I heard that name? Do you know where he come from?" he asked the engineer.

Richard had no hesitation in saying, with an air of superiority, that he really knew nothing about him.

"Did n't his father live down at Singapore?" the sheriff continued, taking off his hat and examining the blue-silk binding as if it were a form of note-book. The place he referred to so familiarly was not situated in India, but was merely a small settlement across the Massachusetts line, named by the inhabitants with a secure knowledge that the real Singapore would never hear about it, and could therefore be travestied with impunity. "I drove through there once when I was a young man," Major Brown went on reading from the hat-brim, "and had a horse shoed at his forge."

"A blacksmith!" cried Whitcot. "That could n't have been his father." Yet he found himself a little excited.

"Yes, I'm sure of it, now I come to think," the other insisted. "Le' see, Ser'ous, what was his

wife's name? I must have told you once, but I seem to have forgot it."

Serious could n't remember.

"Well, you rec'lect R. V. Swift, don't you?"

The landlord, for perhaps the thousandth time, acknowledged that he did.

The Major dropped into a musing tone. "Cousin to John E. Barker, he was. Some way that woman's name's got somethin' to do with Swift, but I can't seem to place it. R. V. Swift was a pootty sharp blade. What notes he did get off, sometimes! Why, Ser'ous, he said to me one day, says he —"

"But what makes you think that Burlen was the young preacher's father?" Whitcot broke in, getting impatient.

"I'm coming to that bimeby, young man," said the Major, with awful dignity.

In this manner, after exploring several collateral lines of relationship centring upon R. V. Swift, and pursuing a number of reminiscences which always at the last moment escaped him, he gradually unfolded enough of what he knew concerning the Burlens to put Whitcot in possession of a good part of his rival's unhappy story, including fragments as to the sister's disappearance.

He returned to his room in a state of suppressed excitement and triumph. He had never liked Burlen, and the sense that he was latterly becoming a dangerous rival had deepened this dislike almost to hatred. Now, however, possessed of information which might be made very damaging to the young

man, he began to feel generous and almost friendly towards him. At least, he fancied that he did. "Poor fellow!" he sighed, as he stood meditating at his window, overlooking the road that led to Pride's. "It must be very hard for him to think of that sister of his as an outcast, straying round no one knows where. What if she should come to light suddenly? Whew!" He had put himself for a moment in Burlen's position, and this exclamation was extorted by a sense of the terrible embarrassment that such a reappearance of the girl would bring. He continued thinking, on his own account: "It would be curious to see her. Is she handsome, I wonder? She may be, though Burlen" — he deliberated, flattering himself that he would be perfectly just towards the adversary now in his power — "is not; no, certainly is not handsome. I should like to see her, though."

As the thought spent itself, his eye was attracted by a moving object in the misty rain, a little way up the road. Slowly overcoming his abstraction, he narrowed his gaze upon this object, which resolved itself into a woman's brown cloak, disclosing at the opening in front a bit of pink skirt. The woman's head was concealed by a faded umbrella. As she drew nearer, Whitcot noticed that the pink skirt had been torn, for a bit of it hung down brokenly below the cloak. He was struck by her elastic tread, however, which showed her to be young. Presently she shifted the position of the umbrella, and her face became visible as a fresh-colored spot in the gray

blur of the storm ; from which it rapidly advanced into distinctness, like a picture just in process of creation.

It was the face of Ida Hiss, who at that moment was returning from her secret meeting with Timothy Pride, already described.

The slight vibration in Whitcot's brain, caused by that thought concerning Burlen's sister, had not entirely ceased, when he became aware of Ida's identity. If we could measure the action of an idea on the mind, and then discover the connection between this movement and some sensation produced by the sound of a voice, a perfume, or the sight of some person or place, we should see how delicate is the mechanism of what we call Fate. Perhaps the duration of a single second in this process may alter the result of a lifetime. If the form and face of Ida Hiss had not presented themselves to Whitcot at this instant, his passing reflection about Burlen's sister might have buried itself where it first came into being, without ever taking any definite course. As it was, a connection between it and the girl Ida was immediately established.

Here was a mysterious girl, thrown peculiarly in his way by what seemed to him now a chain of coincidences naturally leading to some important conclusion. In his talks with the hotel-loungers he had cautiously tried to learn something about her, but found that her origin and previous whereabouts were shrouded in obscurity. Not even by aid of the all-powerful R. V. Swift was the Major able to develop

any information on these heads. On the other hand the history of Burlen's sister was to some extent known in its beginning, but ended in uncertainty. What could be more natural than to seek in the present fact, Ida, the completion of that unfinished history?

She plashed on over the wet road, came directly below the window, halted, and then mounted Mrs. Tarbox's steps, under the dripping catalpa-tree. To Whitcot, overwrought by the discoveries and speculations just then occupying him, it seemed as if she must be coming to furnish him with corroboration of his surmises; and as she passed out of his view under the branches of the catalpa, he even fancied that he could detect in her browned complexion and the subtle sadness diffused through her features a striking resemblance to the young theologian. The truth was, the girl had stopped merely to talk with Mrs. Tarbox; partly as a safeguard in case of pertinacious questions from Rudyard. Whitcot soon comprehended that he was letting his fancy carry him away. After all, what substantial ground had he for assuming it to be even remotely possible that this was Burlen's sister?

But the possibility kept coming back to him, in the following days. Whoever she was, her singular position with regard to Timothy Pride and Rudyard, of which he had accidentally got an inkling, made him inquisitive, and he sounded Mrs. Tarbox concerning her. All he could find out was that Rudyard was supposed to be "courting" her, and, being of a

ferociously jealous disposition, assumed a kind of proprietorship in her, watching all her movements with sullen vigilance ; while she, for the sake of defiance, Mrs. Tarbox thought, kept up a laborious flirtation with Timothy.

Whitcot wondered what he had better do. "Perhaps," he reflected, "I ought to go and tell Burlen what I think, and let him judge for himself who she is." That would involve letting his rival know that he had got hold of his family history ; which would, he meditated with a pretence of compassion, be a severe blow to him. No ; he would spare the unfortunate fellow for the present. He would "hold on" a while. Having reached this decision, he applied himself to his drawing-materials and soon convinced himself that he was about to become a capital engineer.

XIII.

NOTHING PARTICULAR ; HENCE, IMPORTANT.

THE days of the world form a sort of cell-growth. Each one repeats something that some previous day has brought to pass, and contains within itself the possibility of almost every conceivable mundane event. It is individual, yet exists only as a part of the great homogeneous structure of time. One day is added to another, until the whole fabric of a year or an age or a lifetime is completed, flowers and falls away, — and the cell-building still goes on. For this reason the days when “nothing particular” occurs to us are as significant as others in moving along the great process of growth.

With the bright weather, Whitcot came cheerily up to make a call, and was received with great warmth by Mrs. Savland.

“I stopped at the post-office,” he said, “and found this letter waiting for you, Edith.”

She opened it, and disclosed four pages of fashionable chirography. “It’s from Viola,” she made known. “It must have been waiting some time. Let me see — why, she’ll be here to-day!” she exclaimed, disentangling the fact from the maze of writing. “How delightful!”

Hereupon there was a good deal of small excitement. Mrs. Pride had to be notified, and arrangements must be made for meeting Viola at the station. "I'll attend to all that," said Richard, in his largest-hearted manner.

"That's very good of you, Richard. But, no; after all, she'd never forgive me if I did n't go down to meet her myself."

"We might possibly go together," he suggested, archly.

"Yes; Mr. Pride will drive us."

"You must come back to dinner with us: I insist upon it," Mrs. Savland declared.

All this time Burlen was sitting unconscious among some wild-cherry trees that clustered around a large granite boulder, forming a natural bower, a convenient out-door study, some distance from the house, and was absorbed in reading. When he emerged towards noon, he encountered Mr. Pride mowing.

"Hullo! Did n't go down with the folks?" asked the farmer.

"Where? I did n't know they were gone."

Pride gave another sweep with his scythe, and paused. "Seems the young lady's gone down to meet her friend that's comin'. Wanted me to drive her, she did; but then I could n't, no more'n fly. I got too much to do."

"Why did n't you tell me? I hope she has n't had to go alone." Burlen was irritated.

"Oh, no," said Pride, wiping his brow. "That ar spruce young chap 't was with you folks the fust

day — Whichcoat, or Turncoat, or whatever he's called," he specified, revenging himself for the engineer's former facetiousness towards him: "*he* was up here, and *he's* drove."

Burlen was more irritated than before. "Whitcot, you mean," he corrected. "I wish you had told me."

"Thought you was a busy man like me," returned Pride. "Them young whipper-snappers hev got time 'nough to run round with the gals, but farmin' and preachin' takes too much work to leave a man free."

"How does your farming go, now-a-days?" Burlen asked, to change the subject.

"Well, it's consid'able like the roads 'reound here — all up-hill. Look at that grass, now."

"It's pretty short; that's true."

"Short? I guess 't is. Why, I kin remember of the time when it was up to here." Pride had on enormous overalls extending as high as his chest, and making his long legs look like stilts. He pointed as he spoke to the straps of this garment, near his arm-pit, as indicating the former height of the grass. "Yes, sir," he proceeded; "that was when my gran'father was alive. Folks did n't hev mowin' machines, them days; they raised a big fam'ly of boys instid, to do the mowin' for 'em. Now the crops are smaller, and the fam'lies are smaller, too. In my father's day the grass had got down to *here*." Mr. Pride aimed a blow at himself in the region of the waist, with the edge of his hand. "*Now*, you

see, it ain't hardly up to my knee. All the while I was growin' up, the grass was growin' down." And his lank person, encased in the overalls, did in fact seem to supply a convenient measure for every stage of decline in local prosperity.

"I should think you'd get discouraged," remarked his listener, sadly.

"Tell you," reiterated the man, warming to his subject as he saw it was appreciated, "farmin's a difficult business. Take a man's lifetime to learn all the crooks and turnin's of it, 't would. And then he would n't know 'em, p'raps, after all," he added, feeling that his first climax was not strong enough, and that he might as well make the case hopeless while he was about it.

"Yes, I know the obstacles," said Burlen, thoroughly interested. "I saw something of them while I was a boy."

"I want to know!" exclaimed Pride, taking a new view of him, as he rested one arm on his scythe. "You mean to tell me you was brought up on the hay?"

"Well, no; I was n't a farmer's son. But I've lived in the country."

"I'm glad to hear that, now," the other declared. "Ain't nothin' like it, come to look at it; be there?"

"I have a leaning towards it," Burlen confessed. "But I wish you'd tell me, Mr. Pride, what's going to become of all this country, now that it's getting so hard for farmers to live?"

"My opinion is, it'll all jest grow up to timber again. You see how many empty houses there be a'ready. Factories here and there, 'n' a few villages; *they'll* stay. But the rest won't be no better 'n a wilderness. Everybody 's goin' West, or else down to the cities."

"There's something wrong about it," said the young man, meditatively. "It ought not to be so."

"No," Pride agreed. "It had n't ought." But his conscience smiting him for his idleness, and his back being rested, he now bent to his work again, and the talk ended.

Burlen watched him for a moment dipping with his scythe, fetching the steel with a cool "swish" through the grass; bobbing down again as if about to disappear entirely in the engulfing overalls, and then rising once more to prepare for another sweep. After this the young man went away to the house, wondering whether something could not be done to bring back the spirit of progress to this neighborhood, and to put some higher quality into the life of the people. Ought he not to decide, that, instead of acceding to Archdale's ambitious views for him, he would devote his whole career to this object, if they should choose him for their pastor? It was a momentary mood, yet it left an impression on him.

Meanwhile Whitcot had availed himself of his solitary drive with Edith to venture upon an episode of sentiment.

"I'm awfully lonely," he began, "down there at the Tarbox *château*. The old man and woman talk

about their dead son all the time, and say that I remind them of him. I should think I might, in my present condition. I'm already half dead with isolation, and Mrs. Tarbox evidently means to finish the business, judging from the amount of hot biscuit and pie and doughnuts she gives me to eat."

"Poor Richard! I'm really sorry for you! Don't you think you could manage to find a place up nearer to us? There are several houses about, where I think they might take a boarder."

Thus encouraged, Richard became gloomy. He always, with his mistaken taste for tragedy, became gloomy as soon as he thought Edith would be affected by it. "I don't think I should be any better off at one of them," he said, "unless I could really see a great deal more of you." And, to emphasize his sadness, he launched a blow at Pride's horse with the whip.

"Please don't do that again!" Edith begged, seeing that the effect on the horse nearly threw them off the seat. "But I'm sure I don't understand why we should n't see a great deal of you, if you were nearer."

"Oh, you would, I suppose," he returned, in a melancholy manner.

"Ah, yes!" she said, imitating his tone; "that would be very sad, would n't it?"

He threw off his gloom, and became extremely business-like. "Look here, Edith!" he said, "are you making fun of me? I don't think it's fair."

"I did n't know that I was saying anything very funny," she returned.

"Well, you understand what I mean. I see, though, that I'm at a great disadvantage."

"How?"

"Well, you've known me so long, you don't look at me as you do at others. Don't you see that I have feelings and am a man, like the others?"

"Of course. I never supposed you were *more* than a man."

Richard gave vent to an impatient sound. "You may laugh at me as much as you please," he declared, with resignation. "I suppose I must submit to that. I would submit to almost anything from you, if only —." He ceased, and there was an awkward interval.

"Well, I'm listening!" she announced.

"You must have noticed, Edith," he recommenced, — "Oh, I don't know how to begin! You take me in such a way: I'm such an old fact to you. But it doesn't make any difference to *me* that we were in school together, except that it makes it all the more wonderful and fascinating. I really love you, Edith."

"Really?" she asked, repeating his phrase with almost a roguish twinkle in her eyes. Then this look abruptly sobered. There was something strange in Whitcot's avowal, though she had often felt that it might be made; and there was something sweet in it, too. He was not, to her, a romantic person, but she could not regard his declaration as altogether prosaic. This light, smiling man, to place himself all at once in so serious an attitude towards her!

And then she knew him so well ; it came so easily and so naturally ; it did not terrify her, as Ravling's love-making had done.

He noticed the change that came over her. "Is that all that you have to say?" he asked, in a hesitating, half-hopeful manner.

It touched her that her old friend should thus be hanging upon her words, his happiness in the balance. "Oh, Richard!" was all she could say for an instant. Her voice had sunk to a lower key. "It seems so strange, from *you*. Am I really to take what you say seriously?"

Whitcot was moved to petulance ; but he saw that it would be out of keeping to give way to it. "I don't know how you can take it any other way," he said gravely, "nor why you should. I certainly am very serious. And," he added, giving an unconscious commentary on his character, "I feel as if I had never been serious before, in my life!"

Edith laughed, — she could not help it, — and yet she had no thought of ridiculing his sentiment. "Is it I who make you serious?" she asked.

"I suppose so," he answered. "All I know is, that everything else seems trifling beside what I feel for you ; and since I came home to America and saw you again, I have been hoping that some time you would consent to marry me."

She appeared to be lost in revery for a moment. "I don't think I ever could," she said, simply, at last.

"Why?" demanded he, with strong feeling. "I

will do everything in my power to make you happy. Only let me try! I may be worth more than I seem, — than I seem to you or myself.”

There was such humility in his presentation of the case, despite his customary self-complaisance, that Edith experienced a new feeling in regard to him. “You mustn’t think of this,” she said, with some disturbance.

“I can’t help it,” he returned. “How can you expect me not to?” A rush of jealousy came over him. “I know there are others who may have interested you; is that the reason you discourage me?”

She lifted her head and gave him a clear, cold look. “What right have you to ask?” was her retort.

“At any rate, *you* have no right to keep me in doubt,” he asserted. “I have told you what is in my heart. You must not trifle with it.”

“I don’t trifle,” said Edith. “I’m not a coquette. I said plainly I could never marry you.”

“And I shall hope, all the same, that you will think differently by and by,” he replied, inwardly congratulating himself on his spirited course.

“At least,” she said frankly, and with apparently good humor, “you can’t hold me responsible for what you think.”

Whitcot made an effort. “I beg your pardon,” he said, with a startling relapse into humility, “if I’ve offended you. Are we friends still, Edith?”

"I'm sure we're nothing else," she answered, smiling most unconcernedly. "Why should we be?"

And so this peculiar piece of courtship ended. Nothing more was said with regard to it, on the drive down or back. Yet, before she went to sleep that night, Edith found herself asking why it was that she did not feel offended with Whitcot, and whether this every-day, common-place sort of proposal was not after all the most natural and the most reasonable kind. Had she been asked what had been said during that drive to Savage's, she would doubtless have answered in good faith: "Nothing particular." Yet that conversation had at least served, though she might not know it, as a point of definition in the several kinds of worship that encompassed her.

XIV.

SUNDRY ARRIVALS.

IT turned out that Archdale had come up by the same train with Miss Viola, though not aware that she was on board, with the intention of giving his sister and daughter a little surprise.

“Why, papa, how you frighten me!” cried Edith, on discovering him at the station. And forthwith she rushed forward to embrace the object of her terror.

He, for his part, greeted Viola with equal astonishment, though with less effusion. “This is even a better surprise than mine!” he exclaimed gayly, approaching to help her down from the platform of the car where she stood.

She barely took time to alight with practised agility before replying (for she prided herself on the aptness of her quotations), —

“‘Prophets’ words are strange, I wis;

But doubly strange are real occurrences,’ —

as Goethe says in the ‘Weissagungen,’ you know. In our case, the strangeness is literally double; is n’t it, Doctor? You and I both!”

On their arrival at the house, the greetings were renewed. “And is this your father, Miss Edith?”

asked Mrs. Pride, who had spread herself expectantly in the doorway as the wagon came up. "The Lord be thanked!"

"Why, what has happened?" Archdale exclaimed, in some alarm.

"Ain't it right to be thankful?" retorted the housewife, with pious asperity.

"Oh, most certainly," he admitted.

"I'm very glad to see you, sir," Mrs. Pride went on, placated. "And I hope ye'll make yourself right to home, and be suited. Thank Heaven!" After which she fluttered away through various unnecessary doors to the kitchen, feeling a placid satisfaction in the devout tone of her welcome.

Mrs. Savland presented her face to be kissed, in the manner of a child; and as Archdale touched his lips to her cheek she pressed his hand significantly, whispering: "This is very good of you, Tom." She regarded his coming as an act of obedience to her warnings. "I do hope you're going to stay, now you're here."

"I can stay only a few days," he said. "I thought we would arrange to have Robert preach his sermon while I'm here, so that I can listen to it and give him my — my support — and criticism."

Whitcot's mischance in his talk with Edith did not prevent his remaining to dinner as had been proposed. He was as gay and restless as ever, and I think she secretly admired his bearing. Mrs. Savland had put him next to her, placing Burlen on the opposite side, with Viola. Whitcot inferred from

this that the aunt was an ally of his ; which added to the secret elation he felt on thinking how surprised every one else at the table would be, if they knew what had passed between Edith and himself. Especially did this reflection gratify him as he looked at Burlen. Burlen, however, was equally pleased at being put where he could survey Edith at ease, and watch her every movement and expression. They were all in the best of spirits ; and Mrs. Pride hovered silently about them, occasionally communicating with Mrs. Savland as to the needs of the table, but in a hushed voice, as if she were at church. Towards the end of the repast, Viola, who was never really happy unless she could connect her own impressions with something she remembered in literature or art, — a habit of looking at one's self in intellectual mirrors, always gratifying to the looker, — began quoting Wordsworth, in connection with the scenery around them. This drew out from Edith a glowing eulogy of Emerson's "Monadnoc," — "which, it seems to me," she declared, "is the noblest mountain-poem ever written. Do you remember, Viola, how at the end he appeals to the mountain, as it looms up on the horizon, to keep us 'wise and sane'? How does it go? —

" 'Of feasters and the frivolous — ' "

"Let's read it aloud, this afternoon!" Viola proposed, her eyes dancing.

"We are the feasters," said Whitcot. "Where are the frivolous?"

The laugh he excited brought them down to prose

again; and Viola, who had transported her water-colors and her Ruskin from Willowbridge, talked about her plans for sketching. Whitcot had something to say about drawing and color being a science which would some time be practised with perfect certainty, instead of by the uncertain aid of inspiration and instinct, as at present. But here Burlen entered the lists actively against him, and they all got into a hot discussion regarding the scientific and the artistic sides of Nature.

"All this," observed Archdale, interposing in a sonorous voice, wherewith he had often quelled dispute among his pupils, — "All this topic of the mystical aspect of Nature and its relations to science and poetry has been very nicely touched in a sermon delivered not long ago by —"

At this instant Mrs. Pride rushed in, and, forgetting the solemnity which she had decided upon as proper to be maintained in the presence of a clergyman, announced excitedly: "There's some one coming a-tenting in the field across the road!"

"Tenting! What? Soldiers?" demanded Mrs. Savland, nervously.

"Oh, no, it's a civil-man; just for fun, sort of," the housewife returned, incoherently.

There was a general stampede to the windows, Mrs. Savland leading. Only Edith was stopped for a moment by Mrs. Pride, who with clasped hands and agonized entreaty inquired if the raspberry pie had tasted "all right."

"Yes, indeed," Edith answered her. "It was excellent."

"The Lord be praised!" gasped Mrs. Pride, with unction, having recovered her religious balance.

What they saw from the windows was that a wagon had driven up through the bars, into the opposite field, from which two men had dismounted. They took from the wagon a trunk, which they carefully deposited. Then they tossed out upon the grass two or three large canvas bags, a number of short bits of wood, and a spade. After this, one of them assumed authority and superintended the other as he marked out a mysterious plan with the spade, and drew out from one of the bags a quantity of wrinkled and corded canvas.

"It's Ravling!" Whitcot exclaimed.

There was a flutter among the ladies. Even such commotion is there—pardon the homely comparison!—in a hen-coop, on the approach of food.

"What in the world is he about, then?" Mrs. Savland asked, disguising her satisfaction under a thin veil of disapproval.

It was seen that the easiest way to get this question answered would be to go out and repeat it to Ravling himself. Accordingly, Archdale and his sister being put in the van, the rest followed.

"Oh," said the lawyer, answering their rapid fire of welcome and inquiry, "I was looking over the Law of Rivers one day, and it struck me that I should like to see a real river up here in the mountains. I've been editing a Digest too, you know; and I found, if I went on, that it would n't leave me much chance of ever digesting anything else. That

was my doctor's feeble joke, please observe : it was n't *mine*. At any rate, he ordered me off for a rest. Well, I went up to Willowbridge yesterday, Miss Welsted, with this hired tent ; and I found you had deserted the place, so I thought it could n't be very advantageous. I concluded to leave Mrs. Withers and flock up here with all the other birds of my feather."

There was a gleefulness in Ravling's manner that rather startled Edith. He seemed to have grown younger, since that unfortunate colloquy of theirs in the pinewood at Marle. May it not have been, also, that she was a trifle piqued at his implying that it was Viola's presence here which had attracted him ?

"I came over from Medoosic," he said to Archdale, "just now."

"Ah, that was the reason we did n't meet."

"Have you had dinner?" asked Mrs. Savland, wreathed in smiles.

"Oh, yes, thanks ; at the hotel. I'm going to be my own commissary-general up here, though."

"That will never do," she declared. "You must come over to the house for your meals."

And, after parley with the Prides, it was agreed that this should be done. Furthermore, in the course of the afternoon, Whitcot made an arrangement with Ravling to move up from Tarbox's and share his humble canvas roof, together with the expenses thereof. In this way it came about that the little group of whom we first caught sight, as they were looking off at the dim blue mountain from the Cleft, were again gathered together almost under the wing of Monadnoc.

XV.

IDYLLIC DAYS.

SINGULARLY enough (as she thought), Mrs. Savland's plan of getting Burlen and Viola occupied with each other did not succeed. Even the accession of Ravling did not result as she had expected. The lawyer and Whitcot both devoted themselves more to Viola than to Edith, during the next few days ; leaving Burlen, as before, full opportunity to converse with Archdale's daughter.

Now that all these young persons were collected in and about the farm-house, there naturally prevailed a great informality and freedom in their association. They organized parties for going to the fields where wild strawberries grew and picking the last of the fruit ; they made impromptu picnics in the woods. The three young men would go off together to bathe in a secluded pool which Burlen had discovered in one of the tributaries of the Contoo-cook, which tumbled over a ledge of rock in the depth of the forest and then rested in a basin large enough for swimming, under the branches of a big black ash that clawed the bank with serpentine roots and put its arms out over the amber stream,—a spot destined to become grimly memorable to Burlen, afterward. They went out also with Timothy and

Mr. Pride, to assist more or less languidly in the operation of gathering hay; for the hilly ground about the house was already overspread by that reddish-purple hue wherewith the grass of this region blushing makes known its maturity. In these agricultural sallies they were sure to meet Ann Fernlow, Timothy's intended bride and the daughter of a neighboring farmer. She always came to the relief of the workers under the hot sun, with a pitcher of "swichel," — a harmless, refreshing beverage compounded of vinegar, water, molasses, and grated nutmeg. It was a pleasant sight, which the ladies sometimes watched from under the apple-boughs, to see Pride and his son pitchforking wreaths of hay up from the ground on to the growing mound in the "hay-rigging" (otherwise called wagon); the loose, dried tufts changing from a glinting gray-green as they rose, to a dark hue when seen against the bright sky, as if they were fragments of tangible smoke.

Ann Fernlow, in her broad straw hat bound down by a single ribbon, looked like a figure out of one of Whittier's idylls, and was so timid that she would hardly speak a word. Yet they all conceived the greatest fondness for her, regarded her as an indispensable personage, and watched her relations with Timothy with the minutest interest.

What triumphal entries, too, took place, when a freshly piled load of hay was driven into the barn by the approach from the high land above it, which brought the team in on the second story! — Ann seated on the front of the fragrant harvest like an

unconscious rustic goddess, and Viola and Edith with the three young men picturesquely disposed on the yielding mass, while Timothy, buried somewhere down in front, his ruddy face fringed with dangling straws, managed the horses !

In this same barn, where Pride fortunately kept no animals, the friends also got up some charades. They even dramatized the house-adder ; Burlen writing a ballad entitled " The Checkaddada ; or, The Serpent of the Cellar," which Whitcot gallantly recited while attacking with a wooden sword a stuffed snake manufactured by the ladies out of spotted cloth. This formidable reptile was agitated by means of a line attached to a fishing-pole, which Timothy manipulated from the hay-loft where he could not be seen. The performance was a popular success, being witnessed by the Prides and some of their intimate friends, democratically seated side by side with Archdale and his sister, and a family from a villa near Savage's, with whom Mrs. Savland discovered that she had formerly had some acquaintance. The audience was further strengthened by the Rev. Franklin Bland, the youthful rector of a small Episcopal church in the mill-village, and by the wife of the Unitarian minister, Dr. Snowe, with several of her children.

Dr. Snowe was a mild, white-haired gentleman, submissive and politic in manner, as became a clergyman dependent on his flock and weighed down by a very small salary and a very large family. The Rev. Franklin Bland was a lucid-eyed bachelor,

possessed of an independent income, a high white forehead, and a still whiter necktie, who was very dogmatic and very prolific in ideas of ecclesiastical reform, which he was resolved to carry out before his hair—emulating his forehead and his necktie—should become as blached as Dr. Snowe's. But as yet he had only some two dozen communicants in his little black-walnut-lined church. It resembled in size and appearance a lady's work-box. Both these gentlemen interested Burlen a good deal, as specimens of his professional fellow-creatures. Mr. Bland frequently drove up to the farm in a shiny little chaise, and brought into the house a mysterious black case like a long, flat bottle, — uncorking which, so to speak, he allowed a violin to escape in a prolonged flow of melody; for he was a very good performer.

"How in the world did you happen to bury yourself in this out-of-the-way place?" Mrs. Savland bluntly asked him, one evening, intending thereby a gracious compliment.

"Well, I found no good opportunity for interring myself anywhere else," he returned, in his airy, unclerical manner. "I wanted to be of use, and so here I am! One must make a beginning somewhere, you know. Besides," he went on, "there is really more here than you'd think — in the way of material, I mean. Raw material it is, I confess; very raw. Still, now and then, you come upon a person who has yearnings for art and culture and a civilized existence; and there ought to be *some* one here to help them on a little." Saying which, Mr. Bland became

more lucid as to the eyes than ever, and his forehead seemed to grow a little whiter, with the repressed conviction that he was the man to help them, if any one could.

Burlen was attracted by his honest good-will; though he afterwards learned from the gossip of the neighborhood that a "fiddling minister" was regarded by most of the population as a doubtful acquisition. "I'm glad you stick to it!" he said warmly, feeling that he would like to share in the work. "This region seems mournfully dead; but then I know that there's a great intelligence in the people. I find they read the magazines and papers, and know what's going on in the world. That's the secret of our power, — that the country districts are always producing vigorous men who rise above their circumstances, go out and become powerful in affairs, and bring fresh life into the cities. But sometimes I wish more of them would rise all the same and just stay where they are in the country, to make the life there richer and nobler."

Mr. Bland seemed to have tired of the subject already. "Yes, they're keen and quick," he said. "I don't know about 'the people.' It's a sentimental word. But there are exceptions among them worth looking after. And then," — he took up his violin and began fingering the strings, — "when it comes to a crisis, I confess" — he tucked the instrument under his chin — "their hearts are generally on the right side. Generally — on — the" — here he applied the bow, and was immediately lost in some honeyed strains of Mendelssohn.

"We ought to have a piano up here," Mrs. Savland declared, when they were all excited by his playing. "Don't you think we could, Tom?"

"I've been in terror," Edith added, laughing, "lest Mr. Pride should go off and borrow a melodeon, as he threatened to the other day."

"That must be prevented, if we perish in the attempt," said Archdale, who was wont to assume an awkward playfulness when his sister called him "Tom." And in half an hour he had forgotten all about it.

"Do you play, Miss Archdale?" Bland asked, his face lighting.

"Hardly. But Miss Welsted does."

Four days later a heavy wagon drove up to the door-yard, containing what might have been taken for the frame of a prepared hippopotamus kicking his petrified joints into the air, under tarpaulin wraps. This object turned out to be a piano, which Ravling had ordered by telegraph. Viola, at the discovery, gave him a concentrated look of thanks; and indeed Edith perceived that Ravling's effort of thoughtfulness might have been meant quite as much to gratify Viola as to carry out *her* expressed wish.

Very pretty Viola looked, that evening, seated at the keyboard with her pale-brown hair softly irradiated by the candle-light; very *riante* and *insouciant*, as she herself would probably have said, had she seen the effect she made. Her delicate white dress had about it some bits of glistening white Spanish lace, — enough to give it an air of reserved elegance,

yet perhaps also enough to make it too rich, in contrast with the republican simplicity of Washington and his troops, as they executed their motionless manœuvres on the wall-paper around her. The Rev. Mr. Bland, however, was not disturbed by that; and he greatly admired the taste which had led her to arrange a few pale-yellow flowers, from Mrs. Pride's garden, on one side of her dress, near her neck. The faint color in her face gave the last needed touch to what was really a charming picture. The two tried some pieces for piano and violin. In fact, after this, their music gave them so much reason for meeting that it began to look as if Mr. Bland found other reasons, as well, for becoming more and more attentive. Possibly this assisted Ravling in arriving at the conclusion that Miss Viola was, after all, much more attractive than he had formerly thought her.

"How glorious it would be to hear a full orchestra, of the best kind, among these hills!" she suggested, with a sudden fancy, turning half round in the piano-chair.

Edith clapped her hands with delight. "Oh, yes! That grand symphony, 'The Highlands,' that we heard last winter. Niels Gade's: do you remember?"

"It ought to be something of that school," Viola assented: "something Wagneresque, weird, vague, you know. By the way," she added, directing her words to Burlen, "there's something in the scenery up here that makes me think of Ossian. Don't you think so? Don't you feel the solemnity?"

"I feel it, but I don't know Ossian," he confessed modestly.

Viola rose to cross the room, which she did with a light, rhythmical, cultivated step peculiar to her. Her eyes encountered Ravling's, with a sort of appeal as if to say: "*You've read Ossian?*"

"I had n't thought of it," he answered, as she took a place near him. "One little thing in Ossian I've always remembered; and that is the beautiful Agandecca, whose steps were 'like the music of songs.'"

There was a gentle buzz of conversation among the others at this instant, so that the remark became Viola's sole property, and assumed the value of a very pointed compliment. She blushed; and Ravling, with whom this turn of the thing had been quite unpremeditated, found himself attacked by some confusion, too.

Other diversions made the time pass pleasantly. Sometimes there would be an amateur botanical foray upon the woods, under Viola's lead; at other times there was archery, or an out-door reading in the bobolink-haunted orchard, where a couple of hammocks had been swung in the shade at a spot from which the whole group could get views down the widening valley towards Savage's, with its coronet of mountain-peaks at the north, and the great bulk of Monadnoc's watchet-blue wall on the left. Another day they made a trip to Dublin Lake, — that sparkling sheet lodged upon the heights just behind the arrow-head of the mountain, — and spent an hour

or two there, sifting the clean sand at the water's edge, in which multitudes of little garnets are found, that were ground out of garnet-bearing rock, ages ago, by the slow trituration of natural forces. And there was sharp rivalry among the young men in collecting these minute stones for Edith and Viola, with a view to future necklaces and ear-rings which the two girls planned enthusiastically.

Altogether, the days at this time were as idyllic and pastoral as could be wished. Everything was going on very much as they had dreamed of it when looking forward to their happy leisure here; and no one of the party had the smallest apprehension of the great changes that were soon to take place.

Returning from a botanizing expedition one afternoon, they came to a growth of pines so thick that everything was gray and black within, except for the floor of deep, warm red made by the slow deposit of dead needles from the upper boughs, year by year; and for the dazzling streaks of gold and crimson that fell here and there through some interstice above. These, and the general diffusion of perpetual twilight, revealed a maze of sharp, broken lines, — the dead lower branches, — scratched against the deepening background like fine lines on an etcher's plate. The wanderers were seized with a desire to make their way home by penetrating this enticing barrier.

“‘Through the pine-wood blind with boughs,’”

Miss Viola quoted, as usual.

So the attempt was made, and of course they became separated in carrying it out. Burlen was

not much grieved by the result, since he and Edith remained together, and made their way by themselves. At length they emerged into a glorious beechen glade, just above the desert.

Burlen was touched by a slight chill of premonition. He could not avoid a fancy, that there might be some ill omen in his arriving with Edith at this singular waste, after their struggle in company through the opposing wood. But as he did n't believe in omens, he shook this fancy off.

"There are our puzzling gray figures again, in the sand," he observed, pointing out the withered tree-bole which they had seen on the day of their arrival. And from this point also the resemblance was striking.

"Have you decided yet whether they are bidding each other farewell, or meeting after an absence?" she asked.

"I've never thought of it again," he said. "But it's just as reasonable to think they're meeting, and a good deal pleasanter. So we'll decide upon that."

He laughed a little, and they went on chatting as they proceeded to circumvent the sand and make their way down into the glen of the trout-brook. There, tired with their scramble, they sat down to rest, in an angle formed by two rocks and within hearing of the purling streamlet.

"Do you notice," said Edith, "we can't see the water, from here? But how wonderfully cosey it sounds, tinkling under the grass! Oh, I have an

idea, Mr. Burlen! I think it's almost a poetical one. That murmuring brook seems to be to the silence of this afternoon just what the cloud-shadows are to the landscape under this broad sunlight. What do you think?"

Burlen thought her fresh young heart, responding to such a fancy, was very much like the meadow-rivulet itself, running on in pleasant melody, though unnoticed. But he did not say this. "I agree with you," he answered. "You make me think of a beautiful little poem I once read, called 'The Hidden Brook.' It might have been written about this very one."

"Do you remember it?"

"Only a few lines." After thinking a moment, he was able to recall them:—

"It tones the shrilling of the locust's glee,
And, like a harper's touches falling in
With high notes of a master's violin,
It binds a jarring note to harmony."

"Excellent!" said Edith. "It's just as simple as it ought to be."

He seemed to be pondering. Then he asked: "What sort of a life do you suppose a man must have led, to write that? It ought to have been as clear and untroubled as the brook, I should think. Shouldn't you?"

"Oh, that depends on his own character," she returned, with ready decision. "It does n't seem to matter what a man has suffered, if he only keeps his innocence and sympathy."

Her answer apparently relieved him. "Do you think so?" he demanded eagerly.

Thereupon she began to hesitate. "I know it would n't be so with a woman," she said. "Women seem to have no resource but to live or die by their experience. They can be brave under sorrow, but they can't separate themselves from what they've been through. And men are just the opposite in everything, are n't they?" she questioned, with a simple, half-wondering confidence in his vast knowledge. "At any rate, you must know more about that than I do."

When a man comes to rely upon a woman for the decision of a momentous question, her wisdom upon which he has depended often resolves itself into a counter-question, or a sudden leaning upon him for the final word. And, curiously enough, this is the very best thing she can do for him, sometimes. Neither of them are infallible, I imagine; but the fact that she refers back to him gives him confidence. So Burlen felt that if Edith thought him able to decide, her own decision must be sufficient.

Still, "I only know, as far as I'm concerned," he said, "that I myself feel much better fitted to express something that accords with the rough mountain-streams in the woods around here than with the mildness of this little brook. That's the result of *my* experience."

"What kind?" she asked, timidly.

He was startled to find how near he had drawn to the point of disclosing his bitter reminiscences to

her. "Don't ask me," he urged, with a disturbed look. "I can only say that I've been through a great deal, and that when I recall it I feel old before my time, and fit to deal only with grief and struggle."

It is a trait of the young that they attach so much secret weight to their trials and misfortunes. They hoard them up, and furrow their hearts with the thought of them; and by-and-by, when everything is disclosed, they find that the disclosure, instead of causing a cataclysm, dissipates the whole black chimaera into thin air.

Yet there was a good deal of ground for Burlen's sensitiveness. We find upon the surface of some persons' dispositions, whom we know, a trait which may mean one thing or another, according to its relation with other traits and motives below; and unless we can properly gauge the whole nature to the bottom, we form an unjust judgment of such persons. There is a geology of character, as well as of mountains. The ignoring of this fact by society is the source of infinite wrong and anguish to people who have been put in a false position at the outset of their careers; for the world, having once adopted an unfavorable theory of their moral structure, is slow to abandon it. It was an instinct to protect himself from this wrong, that led the young preacher to try so carefully to separate himself from his past.

Edith was silent for some moments after he spoke. She was not embarrassed; nor did she think anything ill of this friend who was so unlike her other

friends. She was simply wondering what his troubles had been, and whether she should ever know.

"I can hardly understand it," she said, rising as if ready to return to the house. "I have never had any very great griefs. My mother died when I was so young, it is more like things I have read about than something that actually happened." Yet her face grew wistful and sad while she was saying this. "Some time or other," she resumed, with the composure of a thoroughly happy person, and yet in a serious tone, "you must tell me something about yourself. I might learn from it."

The young man's heart beat rapidly. "Ah, if I could!" he half sighed.

He had got up, too, and they were on their way along the brook-side. An impetuous desire came upon him to unlock his feelings to her, to tell her all the half-formed emotions and plans concerning her which pursued him so constantly, and to ask her whether she cared for him, and would take him as he was, so that their lives might be united. But the remembrance of his conversation with her father, the night before leaving Marle, interposed. Archdale had asked him in vague terms not to "take advantage." How remote that possibility had seemed, then; and how near he stood to it, now! He checked the impulse.

They went along through the daisied grass, winding among the boulders and clumps of dark, sweet juniper, past the deserted house where the wild roses had now nearly ceased blooming; and climbed

a stone-wall by a short bridge draped in forsaken-looking vines of wild grape, the green fruit of which was ripening into dashes of ruddy purple where the sun looked through the leaves. They said nothing; but both were busy with thoughts, and the bright world around them seemed to be saying a great deal. When they came to the brook's source, where the spring bubbled up amid long, matted grass so that it was hard to tell where water began and grass ended, they were near the barn, and therefore strolled through it on their way to the house.

The cavernous old building was half full of new hay, the sweetness of which in that cool, dark interior seemed to be the perfume of stored-up sunlight exhaling from the thin, dried stalks.

"Barns like this always fascinate me," said Edith. "Especially when there are no cows in them. It sounds splendid to call them 'kine,' as writers do; but that does n't make them any pleasanter to have in a barn. What I like is this delicious, faint smell of the hay, and the bigness and quietness. Hens I don't object to," she added, as one or two made their appearance in the loft. "Any way, it all makes me think of when I was a little girl and played in barns. It brings back such pleasant memories! You have lived in the country, too. Does n't it bring them back to you?"

She asked without reflection; but she saw at once the shadow that came over his face.

"No, it certainly brings back no pleasant ones," he said, with an effort.

"Oh, I'm sorry I reminded you," she said nervously. "But now really, Mr. Burlen, I can't have you so gloomy about it. I want you to admire the barn."

"I'll try to," he laughed. "Ah, see there, Miss Archdale! That little bird flying, up there." He pointed towards the roof, where a small feathered creature, having accidentally darted in through a seam between the old boards of the side, — some little Strayed Reveller from feasts of orchard and wildwood, — was fluttering to and fro blindly, trying to escape again. In a moment or two he came providentially upon the open loft-door, and was gone. "Did you notice," Burlen asked, "how he kept flying up against the roof, at first? He seemed to think if he could only get towards the sky, it would be all right."

"Yes; poor little creature, he hit his wings so, every time he went up!"

"It's a good deal like some of us others, when we try to rise," he mused.

"Oh, dear! I hope not," said Edith. "*I* want to rise. And can't I do it so as not to hurt my wings? I don't know surely that I've got any wings, though," she ended, facing him with a smile.

"Nor I, either," said Burlen. "I mean simply that people who aspire are always getting hurt. Do you find that laughable?"

"Not at all," she answered. "I thought you were giving *me* a warning. You know that I want to learn and to advance; and you know I feel how pur-

poseless I have been. But I don't wonder at your thinking me foolish to attempt getting any higher."

"You?" he exclaimed. "I wish I could tell you what I *do* think."

"Don't," she begged him, sincerely. "If you do, you'll very likely crush me; and I don't want to be crushed."

They had reached the door opening on the harp-shaped elm and the house; but he paused a moment, resting one hand on the post at the side. Putting down the intense feeling that came over him, he said quietly: "I can't imagine what put all this into your mind. But it's a mistake. Any way, I must say to you that I—I had no idea of that kind. I was thinking of my own aspirations. For yours I feel nothing but — reverence."

He stood looking at her, almost breathless; thinking that perhaps he had said too much. She returned his gaze with one of astonishment.

"Well," she said, finally, "how could you expect me to know that?" And, after a pause: "I think we must have misunderstood each other!"

And so they had. Misunderstanding is sometimes a useful thing. But useful as it is, and frequent as it also is, people are always amazed at it.

XVI.

THE TRIAL-SERMON, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

ARCHDALE had seen nothing to alarm him, since coming to Pride's. He saw Burlen devoting a good many hours to reading and other work, and the rest of the time four young men and women enjoying themselves harmlessly. He even undertook to humiliate his sister Grace, by showing her how groundless had been her fears; though in this, it must be admitted, he did not meet with success.

Meanwhile, he had opportunities to talk with his favorite disciple about his prospects. He was now conducting some diplomatic negotiations intended to result in Burlen's being appointed assistant to a popular and overworked pastor in Boston; though this could follow only after some preliminary service elsewhere.

"So, if you are called to the church here," he said, inclining his spectacles with just the slightest trace of disdainful patronage towards that part of the valley where the Second Church lay, "it will do very well for your novitiate. The salary at Boston, even for the assistant-pastor, would be a good one," he added comfortingly.

The candidate betrayed some dissatisfaction. "I wish," he said slowly, "that we did n't have to consider these money matters so much."

Archdale sighed concurringly; but it was the sigh of a man who had been so long resigned to the sad necessity in question, as to have acquired rather a relish for it. "Nevertheless, since we have to," he said, "it is pleasant to be able to accept a position where there need be no anxiety on that head."

"That is n't quite what I mean. The amount is just what I'd rather not think about. Here's Mr. Bland, who has been talking lately about a 'burning question' in *his* Church, — this very question of the minister being made a hired piece of furniture, or worse; a slave to his vestry or his congregation, on whom he depends for bread. The question does n't burn Bland very badly, because he pays his own salary, and falls back on his violin besides. But even he is stirred indignantly at the thought that ministers of the Gospel may have their tongues tied with a purse-string."

His old preceptor looked annoyed. "My dear Robert, you should have thought of all this before deciding upon your profession."

Burlen remembered what Edith had said to him: "It is not your profession, it is simply *yourself*." He answered, calmly: "I *have* thought of it, and now I'm thinking of it again. Probably I shall be forced to do so very often in my career."

"Yes; it is, perhaps, a useful instrument to humility," Archdale returned, dropping into resignation once more.

“At any rate, I should be no nearer independence in the city, with a larger salary, than with a small one up here, where living is cheap,” the other argued. “I have been forming the idea that I should like to devote myself wholly to this locality. It needs devotion enough.”

“Well, that’s the right spirit,” Archdale responded, as if he were deciding upon a reading in some ancient author. “We can determine that matter by-and-by, though. I’m glad to see you so earnest; but don’t let yourself be carried away.”

Burlen went from the colloquy a little saddened. He began to see that there were serious differences between his old friend and himself. To be “carried away” was just what he thought essential; and if more persons could be so borne on to enthusiastic devotion to great aims with small rewards, he thought it would be better for the world. But he soon threw himself again into the current of the sermon he was working upon.

The appointed Sunday came. The church-bells jangled harshly up from the valley, very distinct in the silent air. When they began, the thrushes that had been carolling in the woods ceased, as if rudely admonished of impiety. Only the more insensible sound of the cow-bells from cattle grazing at pasture responded to the signals from the steeples. The peace that reigned in the hill-fields, however, was so suggestive of worship that it seemed almost a mistake to descend to the confined space of the village churches for that ceremony. But by the time the

bells had stopped ringing and the thrushes had resumed their lonely song, the party from Pride's had taken their places in the stiff-backed pews, garnished with palm-leaf fans and black-bound hymn-books.

Archdale and Burlen both sat behind the ugly pulpit, which rose in a mass of veneered curves and scrolls at one end of the church. The old sexton pulled at the bell-rope dangling through the ceiling of the porch, with a long, steady motion, as if he were making all sail for heaven, and the meeting-house were a craft on which the last stragglers, coming up the road, had better hasten to embark before it got under way. Then the last mournful strokes came to an end, the sexton crept noiselessly to his usual post near the door; there was a brief hush, and the latest-comers, on entering, went to their places with a guilty air. After which, the service began.

When the moment for the sermon arrived, Burlen began, very quietly and with some embarrassment, by reading a text from Isaiah, telling how, in the last days, "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains;" and another which says that men shall then cast away their idols of silver and gold, "to go into the clefts of the rocks and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth."

He startled the country-folk a little by following this with a question so simple, and put in so ordinary a tone, that it seemed to them almost as if he were

jesting: "Did you ever," he said, "ask yourselves what a mountain is, — what it means?" Some of the young girls in the gallery were inclined to titter; but that was always a regular part of the service, with them: the excitement of going to church consisted largely in the effort required to restrain their own risibility. Serious Savage, however, braced himself comfortably in his pew. His ideal of a wholesome mental diet was uninterrupted condiment, and the present discourse promised to be something "spicy," — something that might, in short, be considered pure intellectual nutmeg.

"I have been asking myself that question," Burlen went on, "ever since I have been among these grand hills around us; and my hope to-day is, that I may be able to tell you something of the answer." Then, with a mixture of homely illustration and vivid eloquence, he sketched the similitude between human life and a varied landscape. "We are all familiar with the idea of 'ups and downs' in temporal affairs, and we all feel the forcible symbolism of the Valley of the Shadow of Death and the Hill Difficulty in spiritual experiences. A mountain inspires us. People like to climb it, because it involves vigorous effort, and there is a sense of triumph when it is done. The peak that rises so high above our ordinary levels excites ambition. And when we make an attempt to rise in life, to go higher in spirituality, or accomplish any great action, success in that attempt gives us the same sense of elevation and victory that we feel when we have scaled the peak.

Mountains give us another kind of sympathy, too; for they seem to have suffered and endured, as human creatures do. They have been through all sorts of struggles and shocks; they have been fused in fire, and chilled by choking ice-fields. Sometimes they have been partially overthrown by these convulsions of the earth, and sometimes lifted up still higher; and they all bear the grim marks of their history, just as we get scarred with grief and loss and loneliness, in going through life."

So, after dwelling a little on the physical history of mountains, he began to show the important part they had played in the spiritual history of men. From the Old Testament record of events connected with them, he led effectively to a climax concerning the Sermon on the Mount; and upon that foundation he laid so much of symbolic legend, of noble poetry and powerful description of Nature, that his own discourse seemed gradually to build itself up before the vision of his hearers like a verdure-clad height.

"Yes," he said, in one part, "these natural monuments are among the teachers that Providence has surrounded us with. We may learn from them, just as I may learn from you, or you from me! The world is so full of helpful forces. Even the dumb earth speaks to us." And then he talked to them of *Monadnoc* (almost within range of sight from the church-windows) in such a way that, to many, a sudden glory and awe-inspiring influence appeared to stream down from the rugged eminence they knew so well, and had so long looked upon with comparative

indifference. "But there is one chief lesson which these time-worn shapes convey to us, that I want especially to bring before you," he continued. "When you go up to the top of Monadnoc, you find that you can't take much with you. You have to leave your idols of silver and gold behind; and I might go on and say that you leave many other things behind, — your hardware and your bales of wool, your farms and your swift locomotive. Most of your friends, too, you leave. After reaching the summit, where you can overlook all that you have left, you are almost as much alone and as much separated from those who are dear to you as if you were dead. This is only a type of what happens to every man or woman who is unflinchingly brave, who is devoted to great moral ideas, — let us say, for instance, some reform in advance of the age; or even the daily pursuit of perfect truthfulness. To such persons separation comes; they are often severed by difference of opinion from those whose love they most desire. They stand alone. And then they find themselves upon a mount of sacrifice; they learn to kindle their altar-fires on these lonely summits, and feel as they may never have felt before what it was that Christ endured in that night of prayer on the Mount of Olives!"

He tried to show that in every life there rise such mounts of sacrifice, more or less difficult to ascend, which many people try to avoid, — creeping on in convenient lower places, busy with sordid interests, — though they ought really to be approached bravely

and gloried in. How to prepare for this upward struggle was the next point in his theme; and finally he called upon the people to think where they would wish to stand at that final moment — whether it be of the whole mundane life or of our individual existences — when the Lord “arise to shake terribly the earth.”

In all this, of which I have given but a fragmentary outline, Edith recognized some of the things which she had heard him say before, but now so strengthened and illuminated, and fitting in as parts of such an impressive whole, that they seemed still more striking than at first. She saw that he had chosen for his trial-sermon the very one she had so earnestly urged him to write; and a flush of pride and joy came over her. But before he had finished, his ability and eloquence seemed to carry him so far away from her, that she almost wondered at her own temerity in having ever talked with him about it.

The sermon met with cordial appreciation from a number of the congregation, who afterward lingered in the aisles for a chance to shake hands with the young preacher; having obtained which privilege most of them became suddenly embarrassed, looked as if they had been placed in an awkward predicament contrary to their own wishes, and then stammered out a few rusty words of thanks or congratulation. One of the deacons, however, was heard to say, when moving away from the church, that there had been a great deficiency of doctrine in the discourse.

“There was good points in it,” James Wad-

kin contended; "but he shoots raythersome high. These young fellers mostly doos."

Serious was satisfied: he had been surprised, and shaken out of his usual lethargy. And Ravling, waiting in the porch, overheard a short dialogue between Mrs. Serious and Ann Fernlow, which was also favorable.

"I call that a rema'kable sermon," declared Mrs. Serious; "and comin' from one so young! he don't look more'n a boy sca'cely. He's downright good-looking, too, Ann; not to say handsome. Beautiful set o' teeth he's got."

"He'd make a splendid minister," Ann Fernlow replied, blushing at her own boldness in uttering the opinion. "Then he's so plain and friendly out of the pulpit, the way we see him up to the farm. Did n't you think what he said about the prophets was real good, Mrs. Savage?"

"Sh'd say I did!" the matron exclaimed, rolling up her eyes and looking as if attacked with a fainting-fit, by way of marking her approval. Then, abruptly coming to again: "Yes, he'd ought to fill a pulpit first-rate. Beautiful set o' teeth!"

Mrs. Savage afterward said to her husband, at home: "Ser'ous, that young man'd ought to be engaged."

"Well, I do' know but a temp'ary arrangement might be good policy, if the terms was low," he agreed; the impression of the sermon rapidly giving way to his ordinary fiscal caution.

Ravling had been genuinely pleased by Burlen's

production; and, though there was something approaching a smouldering dislike between them, he expressed his pleasure heartily. The candidate, on his side, remembered with keen discomfort the disparaging tone in which he had overheard the lawyer commenting on his graduation address, and therefore received his encouragement now with the added delight of surprise. He shook Ravling's hand with a quick, glad satisfaction; and the two men, as they looked at one another, underwent a slight change of mind which resulted in mutual respect, even though it stopped short of friendliness.

Edith said nothing, at first. It even seemed to Burlen that she established a distance between them, for which he could not account. But as they were driving back to the farm, Archdale put forth a few criticisms, in a kindly way; among other things raising a doubt as to the propriety of Burlen's having introduced those very legends of St. Patrick which Edith and the young man had been so much interested in.

"Oh, papa!" cried Edith. "I think that was one of the most beautiful things of all."

She turned upon her father with a look of surprise in her proud young face, that had in it at the same time so much of girlish deference and simplicity. And that look and exclamation certainly added much to the reward which Burlen's whole-souled endeavor in his sermon had already brought him.

After their early dinner in the farm-house, Whitcot and Ravling took themselves back to the tent, to

smoke. The ladies retired into a suitable Sunday privacy of reading, letter-writing, napping, and talking over dresses; and before long Archdale and Burlen, though they did not smoke, came out and joined the occupants of the tent.

The lawyer was looking over some newspapers of the day before, when they entered, but laid them aside when he saw Archdale.

"This is a terrible affair that Linkinfoot has got into," he remarked gravely. "I have just been reading the latest reports about it. I wish to heavens it could all be cleared up and dismissed."

Linkinfoot was a preacher of considerable renown, whose fame had at that time recently been attacked by charges which involved it in an appalling scandal of the grossest kind. The first rumor of it had been received with disgusted incredulity by the public; but matters took such a course that doubts arose, and then a sickening disappointment began to creep into men's minds.

Ideas, sentiments, emotions, travel rapidly in America, because of the simple nature of society and the effectual brotherhood that unites closely such large masses of the community. Every astounding or unexpected event relating to even one person, or a small group, — especially if they stand out prominently in the public view, — has a widespread influence; even more than is usual elsewhere, because we at once, knowing that the nation is young and feeling all that hangs upon its future, try to judge of this event as revealing to us something of ourselves

unseen before, and as a force that is likely to have an effect on our general development. For good or evil, this sympathy among us is intense; and at the time of the Linkinfoot scandal it was carrying into every cranny and corner which the press could reach a wave of sorrow and discouragement.

When Ravling referred to it, it had not yet reached the stage of long and loathsome reports in judicial proceedings daily made public, nor had people reached the callous period of referring to it in general conversation; and the four gentlemen talked of it together with a sense of outrage that they should be forced to talk of it at all.

They got rid of it as soon as possible; but the next subject that came up was the late political news, which involved assertions of enormous frauds in elections, corrupt machinations among party leaders, and charges of demoralizing personal favoritism in the conduct of certain Government financial transactions.

"I wonder how much of all this is true," speculated Burlen, wearily.

"The trouble is that both parties," said Archdale, "keep on asserting such baseness in each other, that finally neither of them has moral sensitiveness enough left to save even itself—much less the country."

Whitcot, however, gave it as his belief that the whole trouble lay in the unmitigated wickedness of the Democrats. "Really," he said, with an air of being dazed by the thought, "I don't see how such

a party exists! It has n't a single virtuous point about it."

"I don't see how it *does* exist, if that's the case," remarked Ravling, drily; though he, too, was a Republican.

Burlen belonged to the same party, when it came to a vote. He could no more have graduated at Marle, without drifting, theoretically at least, into the orthodox political creed of Massachusetts, than he could have induced himself to turn a somersault while preaching. Nevertheless, "I don't believe the nation is divided so exactly into villains and saints," he asserted. "All the knaves are not fools, and some of them will get on to the winning side, which ever it is. What discourages me is this continual story of wrong-doing, which seems to be true of both."

"We must n't despair, though," said Archdale, placidly. (He had not attended an election for years.)

"That's just what I think, too," Burlen was quick to reply. "But if we are not to despair, we must *do* something! In politics we have these records of corruption and compromise, day by day. In religious life we begin to have phenomena like this of Linkinfoot. In business we have a few men growing enormously rich by rings and shams, at the expense of multitudes. Everywhere people seem to be going in for the big prizes, and principle seems to come out with no prizes at all. That's why I think we need examples of sacrifice,—men to stand

in the breach, to give up their lives to some ideal work and do it well, even if it's in some small sphere and imposes poverty on them. Practical work ought to be done in the same spirit, too. — However, I don't mean to deliver a second sermon to-day," he concluded with a smile, which gave place to a look of earnest meditation.

"There are a good many men of the kind you describe," said Ravling, "already."

"I know there are. But how seldom they come into the ascendant! Nothing can save us from deterioration, unless they appear everywhere, in all walks of life, and acquire the ruling influence again as they had it in the old days of the Republic. We're too successful, we grow too fast and make wealth too easily, to be safe without counteracting forces."

Nobody answered, and they relapsed into uneasy reflection. None of the four felt anxiety as to immediate national disaster: no American does. But, looking long years ahead, each one was clearly conscious of injurious powers subtly at work, which might in the end sap and crumble away much that was fairest and noblest in the country.

As they walked back to the house together, Burlen told Archdale of Pride's remark about the desert. "The recent news gives it still greater point than it had when I first heard it," was his comment. "A moral desert is slowly blowing and spreading among us, just like that one; but

because there is so much fertile ground left, people hardly notice it."

"I don't understand your being so despondent, Robert," said Archdale. "It's not natural in a young man."

"I'm not despondent," his former pupil answered him; "I'm very hopeful. But may n't it be that young eyes sometimes see farther than old ones, — even in these things?"

XVII.

A FRIENDLY ENEMY.

WHAT had struck Whitcot more than anything else on the occasion of Burlen's sermon was, that he had seen Ida Hiss listening attentively in an out-of-the-way corner of the gallery. She did not seem in place there, and his hazy hypothesis in regard to her again began to float before him and take a more positive shape. Such a girl as she seemed to be could hardly, he thought, be in the habit of coming to church; but if she were Burlen's sister, it might well be that, under cover of her assumed name and feeling secure against recognition, she should wish to hear her brother, who had been brought by accident so near her.

He woke up during the night, in the tent, and thought of this again. But that time his whole suspicion appeared to him the frailest kind of phantasm. He had manufactured it out of nothing! He would put it out of his mind.

The morning only increased the unreality of his imaginings. Still, he did not altogether put them away.

Archdale was to leave them on that day, and go back to his Apologists at Marle; so that the morning was a good deal occupied in seeing him off. But,

notwithstanding this, Whitcot had opportunity before afternoon to observe — as he fancied — a noticeable change in Edith. His recent sentimental advance towards her had left him rather confident than otherwise; and their old acquaintance had enabled them to go on meeting among the rest, without embarrassment, while he was meditating how and when he should next speak to her. But to-day he began to fear that he had been reckoning hastily. She obviously was indifferent to his existence. She was abstracted and altered in manner; there was a certain dreaminess in her eyes, unnoticed by him before. And, worse than all, he could see that she was observing Burlen and attending to everything he said, with an interest that threatened to obliterate every other.

He had discovered, in talking with her the evening before, her high opinion of the sermon; and it did not take him long to infer from that and from the present signs that Burlen had at last perhaps really touched deeply responsive chords in her.

The conclusion set him thinking again about the lost sister, Thyrsa Burlen. How very convenient it would be, now, if Ida Hiss should prove to be she! Ought he not at least to put Mrs. Savland and Edith in possession of what he had learned as to the clerical candidate's past? He was suddenly smitten with a high regard for his own magnanimity in having kept it to himself so long. But, no! On second thought, it might savor of under-handed envy, if he went to Edith with this tale. He flattered himself

that he was too much of a gentleman to run that risk—even for her benefit. He would go directly to Burlen and tell him what had occurred to him in regard to Ida.

Seeing him start off down the brook-glen with a book in his hand, he followed with a trout-pole, though there were no fish to be caught at this season, and managed thus to come conveniently upon him.

“Ah,” cried Burlen, as he approached; “fishing? What for?—bobolinks or butterflies?”

“Neither,” Whitcot answered seriously. “I think I’m a fisher of men, this time. I’m after you.”

“I’ll consider myself caught, then.”

“I want to speak with you in private. Suppose we walk up under the trees there.”

Decidedly curious to know what confidential communication was about to be made, Burlen closed his book and went with him. A few general remarks were made, and then as they came under the shade of the trees Whitcot, who had laid his plan carefully, stopped, turned towards his companion, and looking into his eyes said: “I think I’ve found your sister.”

Burlen’s face flushed violently: his eyes flashed with what might have been either supreme excitement or rising menace. In an instant he became calmer, and asked coldly: “My sister? Where?”

“Here—at Savage’s.”

“I have never mentioned her to you. What do you know about her? What right have you to

speak?" Burlen's voice had sunk, but there was something vindictive and biting in its tones.

Whitcot began to be frightened at the force of the blast to which he had touched his match.

"I know all the facts," he said, rather timorously, "and I have come to you simply as a friend."

"A friend — with a knife in your hand!"

"Oh, if you're going to be violent —"

"I beg your pardon." Burlen put a strong pressure upon himself. "Tell me your reasons, then. But be quick!"

Whitcot gave a rapid explanation. "It's the very woman I spoke to you about at the hotel, the day we came," he concluded. "The waitress there. You remember?"

"Yes; but you say she bears another name. Besides, why should n't I have thought of it, when I saw her? Do you think you see any — any —"

"Resemblance, you mean? Well, I don't know. I'm not positive, of course. And then perhaps it's all a fancy of mine, any way." To his surprise the engineer, when he saw the other man's agitation, found himself rather anxious to soften or smooth away the trouble he had caused. And this confirmed him in his fallacious belief that there was nothing of malice in the motive which had brought him to take his present step.

"Do you think you could recognize your sister yourself, now?"

"I doubt if I could judge with certainty," his victim returned, despondently. "It is eleven years since I saw her."

"That would make her how old?"

"About thirty. And in these years, especially, she must have changed greatly."

"I don't think this girl Ida can be so old as that," said Whitcot, impartially.

"You don't? There is a doubt, then?"

"She might be, though, — it's very hard to tell, — she's such a mysterious creature." Whitcot's compassion began to cool again, the moment he became less confident of his position.

"I can't bear this suspense!" exclaimed Burlen, in a tone of revolt. "I must see her myself. I must see her!" And he made a few strides away in the direction of the village, as if for immediate execution of that purpose.

"By all means you must see her," said Richard, coolly. "That was what I was going to propose."

"Come, then!" almost shouted his companion.

"I must warn you," said the adviser, "that it's not easy to see her — with safety."

"What do you mean?" The young preacher frowned sternly upon him.

"I mean there's a man in the way."

Burlen smote his forehead with his hand. His whole frame visibly shook with wrath and horror. Then he moaned, in surrender to the worst: "Go on. Tell me the whole. What is it?"

"I don't know," Richard blandly confessed, "except this, that the fellow has some hold upon her — upon Ida Hiss, mind: she may not be your sister, you know. But he watches her like a lynx, and is as

full of jealousy as a powder-magazine is of danger." He then related something of his own experiences with Rudyard, and the way in which he had been pursued by him. "I laughed at him for his prowling, when I saw him in the village afterwards," he said. "But I have no desire to be mixed up with him and his jealousies again."

"What is all this to me?" Burlen demanded, angrily.

"It simply shows you why I have n't been able to make any inquiries of her before speaking to you, and why you 'd better be cautious in your movements."

"Very well; what's to be done, then? Speak! Don't you see I'm bewildered — helpless? Do you understand what I feel, and do you think it's manly to go on torturing me?" The candidate for the ministry seized him by the arm, with an iron grip. "Come, I want to know."

"Let go of me first!" Whitcot commanded hotly. He was furious at the other's touch. "*Gentlemen* don't converse with the aid of their fists."

Burlen relaxed his grasp. The taunt made him quiver, but it also gave him self-control in the contempt he began to feel for his professed friend. "Have you anything more to say that's to the purpose?" he asked.

Whitcot looked sullen, but gradually regained his composure. "I had thought of a plan," he said, distantly. "There's going to be a sort of assembly of a charitable association among the woollen-mill

people in the village, Wednesday evening, and she'll probably be there on Rudyard's account. We might go there, without much trouble."

"I suppose it's possible," Burlen returned, drearily. "How can we find out about it?"

"Here's the announcement," said Whitcot, drawing from his pocket a crumpled hand-bill. "It was given me at the hotel."

The document read thus: —

LEVEE!

The Union Mills C. B. Association.

AT TOWN HALL.

 This is intended to be a thoroughly sociable affair.

MUSIC AND DANCING.



Oysters, Candy, Ice-cream, etc.



COME EARLY AND HAVE A GOOD TIME!

Burlen read it twice, with listless disgust; and the crude hilarity of its wording seemed to be aimed mockingly at himself. "A good time!" he repeated, under his breath. "Well," he said aloud, returning the bill, "if there's no better way, I'll make the experiment. You will go with me?"

"Certainly, if you prefer."

"And meanwhile it's understood, I suppose, that until further developments you will keep this matter to yourself?"

"Of course, Burlen. What do you take me for?" Whitcot rejoined with beaming generosity.

They then separated, and the student walked further on toward the sandy stretch. When he was out of sight, he sank down at the foot of a tree, overcome with wretchedness. "It was an omen, after all," he murmured. "That semblance of two figures means a parting, a long farewell; and I am to be parted from Edith! I see. This is to be *my* sacrifice." His own sermon was coming home to him.

"Dear me sus! That cellar-door won't jag no-how!" groaned Mrs. Pride, as she came into the sitting-room that evening, having just brought up from the home of the house-adder a glass of milk for Mrs. Savland to take just before going to bed. "I s'pose you think I'm in a dreadful pheese about it. Well, so I am and no mistake. Besides, everything seems to be pernicketty to-day. There's Ann Fernlow come up this arternoon for some soft soap, but her pail wa'n't bailed true, nor nothin'; so she could n't carry it. What's more, father had n't got the soap ready, and she could n't have carried it if it *had* been bailed, — the pail that is; and Tim'thy, he would n't even come and say Bo-to-a-goose to her. I don' know what in poky's come over Tim'thy, late days; he don't pay no sort o' tention to her, and yet a nicer, handier gal you don't find this side Monadnoc, take it as you may from one degree of attitude to another! I more'n half believe it's that terr'ble Ida gal down to the village 'at's brewing mischief

atween him and Ann. Now should you s'pose any one 'd do so?"

Here the ancient woman, having set down the milk, contemplated Edith and her aunt earnestly; her gray and white face twitching uneasily, as old faces and old cobwebs do when they have hung too long in the same place and are disturbed.

"I'm sure," said Mrs. Savland, with refined precision, "I've no idea who the person is you allude to, and I can't in the least form a judgment."

"And then there's Mr. Burlen," continued Mrs. Pride, gliding to another subject, without the least ruffle at this rebuke, — "there's *another* thing that's all quirky. Why did n't he come down to tea, I'd like to be told?" In fact, the student had kept his room that evening, not even appearing at the table. "He said he did n't feel quite chirk, you know, this eve; but I guess *you'd* ought to know somethin' about that, Miss Edith. I've sort o' skirtled it all round in my mind, and that's about what I make it, that he's just where you can make him as mis'ble as you a min' to. Now don't bear down on him too hard. Take an old mother's advice, that's sort o' blinked in a few idees while she's been a dustin' round this poor world of ours."

Mrs Savland's little sand-papared features had sharply contracted with horror while this speech was delivering, and she was prompt to utter at its close an admonition to this effect: "I must beg you, Mrs. Pride, not to bring up again a subject of this sort, which does n't concern you. If my niece needs advice, she will come to me."

"Well, well, suit yourself, Miss Edith," retorted the housewife, indirectly. "One old woman's as good as another, I guess. But you can take your pick. *I ain't proud.*"

The fact remained that Edith was not a little disconcerted at Burlen's indisposition, which she could n't help suspecting — though she did not know why — was more a mental trouble than anything else.

There was a pallor in his brown complexion the next morning. She also noticed how harassed and miserable he looked, during all that day and the one following. He remained as much as possible alone. The truth was, that he suffered almost as keenly from self-reproach as he did from dread of the discovery that seemed to be impending over him. All these years he had been looking forward to finding the lost Thyrsa; for a long time, as he had told Archdale, he had believed that this was his indispensable duty, without the performance of which no other obligation could be faithfully carried out. Many a time he had looked forward with joy to a possible reunion with this sole remaining being to whom close ties of blood bound him. And now, — now when the moment for it approached, — how did he feel? Reluctance and despair had taken the place of that imagined joy. He did not wish to meet his sister. Week by week, without fully analyzing his own state of mind, he had come to feel that he was getting nearer and more near to the goal of winning Edith; and he had shifted the whole fabric of his future to the foundation of that hope. Formerly it had been the recovery

of Thyrsa, on which his plans had depended : now it was the gaining of Edith's love that seemed essential to his success in the world ; and with him success meant usefulness.

But all this, he told himself, was cowardice. By a prodigious effort he brought himself back to a sense of his duty to the one remaining member of his family. If she was really near him at last, he must go and seek her unflinchingly, devotedly.

But before the time came for going to the "social affair" of the "Union Mills C. B. Association," — whatever that might mean, — he matured a resolve which he did not impart to Whitcot. He could not depend upon the engineer, whom he knew to be a possible opponent to his success with Edith. There was no one indeed on whom he could depend, except Archdale.

Accordingly he made an excuse to get to the village before Whitcot, on the appointed Wednesday ; and there he sent off a despatch asking Doctor Archdale to return immediately to the scene he had barely left.

Having accomplished this, he waited for his self-appointed friend, as had been agreed, in the porch of Savage's Hotel. From there they proceeded in company to the Town Hall.

The room had been decorated for the evening's festivities with sundry pine-boughs and streamers ; an extraordinary collection of lamps added to its dowdy brilliancy, and a large crowd of people in would-be showy attire were already assembled, when

the two entered. The "levee" being an important one, Ann Fernlow and Timothy had also made their way there, and Burlen descried them before long amid the slowly-moving mass. In one corner a slender partition of scantlings and thin stringers covered with feebly painted cloth had been raised, separating from the main hall the refreshment department, which was approached through an arched entrance glittering with tinsel. After a time, a short man with puffy cheeks and a white waistcoat made his appearance on the permanent platform at one side of the room, and putting his hand up in a listening position near his ear, — as if he had just heard something of singular importance, — succeeded in attracting attention and producing silence. The wandering throng hereupon paused and listened to some gloomy recitations from an actor "who had kindly consented, being in the neighborhood," etc., and received them with sternly conscientious applause. He was followed by a ventriloquist, who soon threw them into successive spasms of genuine laughter. And when these performances were completed, a small band struck up, and the dancing began.

Whitcot had already pointed out Rudyard to his companion; but they had not as yet seen Ida. A curious old fishers' hornpipe was being danced, in which Major Brown had joined, so as to show the others the fine points of the steps as they used to be executed when *he* was a young man. Ann Fernlow was his partner, and he treated her with an elabora-

tion of gallantry at which Timothy stared in amaze, from the edge of the surrounding crowd. Ann was attired in a plain black dress, which fitted remarkably well, and left no baggy folds that might harbor a doubt as to the natural grace of her youthful figure. A narrow rim of white collar showed just within the black of the dress, where it closed evenly and with a kind of primness around her throat. There was also a small knot of cherry ribbon at that point, and a bow of it on her black hair. Her eyes sparkled with excitement, and there was a pretty color in her cheeks. No time for bashfulness was allowed in this energetic hornpipe. There was a constant forming and reforming of lines and groups; the dancers shifted here and there punctually to the brisk tune of "Comin' Thro' the Rye." Now there was a row of men facing a row of women, all of them shaking about gently as if they had been mounted on wire springs. Major Brown passed into romantic retirement behind the row of men, and there executed a very singular *pas seul* with many eccentric little skips and flings of the feet, such as the victim of a hopeless love might be expected to indulge in during his solitary walks; while Ann Fernlow, screened by the women on the other side, tripped up and down in a daintier manner, the crimson bow fluttering on her head with a heartlessly coquettish motion. Then the two moved around the ends of their respective rows, discovered each other in an accidental way, and apparently came to an understanding with startling swiftness; for they at once joined hands and pranced

contentedly down the lane between the men and women. There was more confusion and more turning; after which another swain and another lass enacted the same silent episode, with the same happy result. Another figure brought the united couples face to face, whereupon they began to skip from side to side with several sprightly steps each way, as if unable to determine how they should pass each other; and, being unable to settle the question, they gave it up and danced off into new combinations.

At last the band ceased to come through the rye, and the tired hornpipers stopped, amid a clapping of hands from the on-lookers. Ann and the Major came out with the chief honors.

Just at that moment Burlen, who had been standing beside the tinsel archway, turned and found himself within two or three feet of the person he had been looking for. Ida was just coming out from the refreshment department. She stopped short and looked at him piercingly. So great was his nervous tension, that this action and the shock of seeing her so unexpectedly almost convinced him that he stood before his sister. He was on the point of uttering her name, when Ida, glancing away again, passed rapidly by and made her way into the crowd.

The young man felt a cold perspiration starting out on his face. He hurried to Whitcot. "I shall be taken sick if I stay here," he whispered. "I can't endure it."

"You saw her, just now?"

"Yes." The word was hardly audible.

"Well? What do you think?"

"I don't know. It's impossible to think. I'm all unstrung."

Whitcot again pitied him. "Are you going away now?" he asked.

"Yes. I'll go alone."

"Very well. Don't be too much cut up, though."

Burlen, without replying, made haste to get off, much to the regret of some of the Second Church people, who had been greatly pleased and somewhat flattered by his coming to the levee, and now vainly tried to detain him.

As he tramped back through the warm and scented darkness, the moon stood slenderly curved in the sky, as if balancing itself on some unseen pinnacle higher than the mountains. Its light and the fresh air quieted him somewhat, and he decided to stroll along a lower road, near the river, before returning to Pride's. He made the detour accordingly, and, finding that he could think over his affairs better here, he sat down on the flat stones of a wall above the river, in deep shadow. The moon did not so much illuminate the rounded fields and the woods that were drawn into sharp points or long curves by the broken conformation, as it enveloped them in mysterious tintings vaguely blent with white; although the brooding, secret waters of the stream were touched with flitting sparkles of sharper radiance. There was a fitness in this dim, uncertain coloring, as regarded his own mood. Everything was very still, and the dam in the village rumbled

with a low sound no more obtrusive than that of a bumble-bee. He had sat motionless a long time in the shadow, and began to think of going, when a rustling of leaves in some hazel-growth between his position and the Contoocook attracted his attention. It was too positive to have been caused by the wind.

He paused, wondering why any one else should have chosen to ramble this way at so late an hour, and became still more alert when he heard subdued voices in that direction. The crackling of some twigs and the pushing of leafy boughs proved that the persons from whom the voices came were proceeding along the river-side, and would soon appear on the open ground. The tones were serious, and were those of a man and woman. The man's voice, even at that distance, appealed to his memory.

Could his suspicion be correct? He got quietly into the low branches of a dense-foliaged maple beside the wall-top, in order to see better and without being seen. In a moment, the two untimely strollers emerged into view.

Burlen could scarcely control his excitement as the form of Ida Hiss outlined itself in the dim, greenish field, two or three rods away. Again, the man who was walking beside her said something argumentatively.

Yes; there could be no doubt. It was Whitcot!

XVIII.

REINFORCEMENTS.

BURLLEN retreated from his post of observation as soon as possible, and set out again on the walk to Pride's hill. His pulse was beating rapidly, for he felt sure that he had detected his friendly enemy's true character. Whitcot's effort to prevent his meeting with the girl, and then this clandestine consultation by night seemed to show clearly enough that some plot was hatching. Exactly what it might be he exhausted conjecture in trying to settle; but vainly.

A light was burning in the tent as he came within sight of it. He went up to it and looked in. Ravling was there alone, reading.

"Whitcot has n't got back yet, I suppose," Burlen hazarded.

"No. It's after eleven, but I have to mount guard till he comes. Can't leave the light burning, and go to sleep: tent might burn, too."

Burlen explained that he had left Whitcot in the hall a good while before. "He found it more entertaining than I did. I've been so leisurely about climbing up here that I thought I'd see whether he had forestalled me. — Good night."

"Good night," said Ravling.

The candidate could no longer imagine that he had in any way deceived himself as to the identity of the loiterer, but he went to his room without waiting for any explanations that night. "If he has no wish to conceal something, he will tell me in the morning what he has been about," he reflected.

But the morning brought no disclosure. The engineer gave no sign of communicativeness.

"You were late last night," said Burlen, significantly, when they got a moment or two alone.

"Yes, quite."

"And did n't you arrive at anything, in your interview by the river?"

Whitcôt started. "Ah," he sneered, "you were within sight after we parted, and yet would n't give me the pleasure of your company?"

"I doubted whether it would be a pleasure to either of us just then," Burlen retorted. "Besides, Rudyard, you know, is dangerous! Had you chained him up, out of the way, that you dared to be out with — with Ida?"

"If you want to practise rhetoric, Burlen, take some other occasion. Because you accidentally caught sight of me under circumstances which you don't understand, you are kind enough to — By the way, what is it you're kind enough to suspect?"

"Nothing. I'm simple enough, though, to think secrecy of movement and reticence on your part decidedly out of place in this matter."

"Yes; because you're not capable of imagining that I was willing to run some risk, in order to have

a talk with this girl and try to find out something definite."

"I can imagine it; but why were n't you ready to tell me of it at once?" asked the student of divinity, beginning to condemn his own haste.

"Simply because there was nothing worth telling. I could n't gain any knowledge from her. — And now," pursued Whitcot, "perhaps you will allow *me* to be incensed at *your* reticence. You might have told me you had telegraphed for Archdale to come to-day."

"How did you learn that I had?"

"In the easiest possible way. The operator told me, at the levee. He wanted to know if any one was ill here." Saying this, the engineer took out a cigar and lighted it; looking cynical the while, as if his faith in humanity were gone, and tobacco alone could be depended on.

Each having mistrusted the other, they were obliged to compromise summarily and open a new account of mutual confidence. Burlen yielded gracefully to the situation, though it did not please him.

The truth as to Whitcot's proceedings had been as follows: Dissatisfied with the very slight and doubtful result of his attempt to disconcert his rival, he decided, even at the hazard of trouble with Rudyard, to consult Ida herself on the subject of her assumed identity with Thyrsa Burlen. "If she really is that person, it's time for me to know it," he said to himself. "And if she is n't —" At this point his mute soliloquy became indefinite. It was not quite clear

to him what he should do, in that case. When a man who esteems himself respectable is drifting nearer and nearer to rascality, there is quite likely to be some part of the course lying before him which he instinctively prefers to leave undetermined.

Whitcot seized a chance, while standing near Ida in the crowd at the levee, to exchange a few words with her in an undertone. He told her he had something very important for her to hear without delay; must speak with her alone that night. She took this very coolly, — which in so far he considered a good sign, — and immediately contrived means for eluding Rudyard and meeting the engineer at a spot which she prescribed for him, just outside of the village.

There he at once broached the subject in his mind; but when he put the direct, crucial question, she appeared rather alarmed.

“I don’t mean to answer,” she affirmed finally.

“That settles it,” said Whitcot. “If you were n’t Thyrza Burlen, you would n’t hesitate about answering.”

The girl laughed at him. “I don’t answer,” she said, “because you’ve got no business to think I’m pretending; and I don’t choose to talk with you about it.”

Whitcot made a feint of quitting the subject, and entered into some slight banter, to which she put an end by saying: “You told me there was something very important for me to know. What is it?”

He proposed to walk a little way and discuss it.

Then it was that he threw out hints and feelers with the object of inducing her to in some way give color to the theory that she was Burlen's sister. It might, in the end, be of great worldly advantage to her, he represented. She appeared to be impressed, but would not commit herself; and this was as far as he could get with her.

Burlen meanwhile awaited Archdale's coming with impatience and suppressed torture. His one glance at Ida's face had shown there some quality, half hidden and half disclosed, which tallied with his own memory of his sister. But why had she avoided him and shown no emotion, if this resemblance were more than accidental? His recollection of Thyrsa and the features of this enigmatical girl united to form a sort of negative picture; but his relations with Edith seemed to pour a flood of light through the negative, and stamp its outlines on his brain as a burning reality. He could not decide, however, whether this was the reality he had so long been in search of; whether his sister was actually at this moment so near him. Archdale could perhaps help him. It might have been in bad taste to summon him so peremptorily, yet he was glad that he had done it.

He expected no return message, for the train would arrive at noon. Still, feeling sure that his old preceptor would not disappoint him, he asked Timothy to borrow the Fernlow chaise for him and bring it into a lane out of sight of the house, whence

he could drive to Powder Brook, — a signal station on the railroad, nearer than Savage's. The train was signalled, and boarding it he found Archdale in it.

"Dear me!" cried the old gentleman. "I had no idea — this is n't Savage's," he said, hastily surveying the diminutive shanty that served as a station.

"No, but I thought it would be more convenient," the young man explained nervously. "I've brought a chaise for you."

They dismounted hurriedly; the professor having only a travelling-bag with him, on which were his initials, worked by Edith in monogram. It contained a copy of Justin and a few other articles of the scholar's toilet.

As the train left them alone in the road, Archdale, standing very straight, his good, honest face shaded by a gathering apprehension, asked: "Is it anything very serious, my dear boy? I hope no one is ill." He tried to look as if prepared for bad news, but the small gray whiskers on either cheek trembled a little after he had done speaking.

"No; all are well," said Burlen. "I must apologize for sending in such haste, because — it was for myself." He looked away, for tears of humiliation sprang to his eyes, which he must repress.

"Yourself?"

"Yes. Get into the chaise, please. I will tell you as we go along."

They drove over the beautiful, wild upland road without further words, for a moment or two. The young man scarcely knew how to begin. "I have n't

told Mrs. Savland you were coming," he said, at length.

"Oh," said Archdale.

Burlen thought there was a frostiness in his voice, which struck him with apprehension. He feared that he had already injured the cause for which he meant to plead, before long, with Edith's father. But whatever the result might be, there was no help for it now. "It was very repugnant to me to take this course," he said firmly. And then he went on to set forth what had happened between him and Whitcot, and what he feared might be true with regard to the reputed Ida Hiss. He did not venture to look into his companion's face while doing this, but at the end he made a short peroration in excuse. "Perhaps you can't form an idea — from your own experience I'm sure you can't — of how this trouble drags me down and discourages me. It seems like a trap set by evil powers, to ruin my career. If this girl is my sister — well, there is no choice then but to give myself up to caring for her and keeping her from harm. And if she is *not*, the doubt and the mystery remain hanging over me. At any moment I may find myself in this same predicament again; possibly at a time when such a disgrace would not fall upon me alone, but would be more public, and humiliate — others — dear to me."

He had spoken earnestly but without vehemence, feeling that he could no longer depend upon sympathy in his listener. From the despondency which fell upon him as he closed, he was roused by a kind touch on his arm.

"I will help you," said Archdale, with a voice almost feminine in its tenderness.

It was a great surprise. The graduate's eyes glowed with gratitude. "Then you will overlook," he began, "my presumption in sending —"

"My dear Robert, you are in great need, which entirely justifies you. Some way must be found of settling your affairs, and I ought to have given them more attention than I have. But since our last talk at Marle I have often turned the subject over in my mind, and I have concluded that you ought to cut adrift from what hampers you. Your own usefulness and the good of others require it."

Burlen did not stop to consider how he could reconcile it with his conscience to cut adrift, should the surmise about Ida prove true. For the moment the delight of finding Archdale so cordial was enough, and seemed to lift the burden from his shoulders.

Just then they reached the highest point in their drive, and the guardian mountain, which had not been seen on the lower windings of the road, came into full view as if to welcome them. Nearer, and divided from it by a gulf, stood the old farm-house and barn, amid the sunlit fields, with huge mulleins spiring up in misty silver-green along the stone-walls by the road. And as they rolled swiftly with a whirl of wheels towards the house, a gray squirrel, having just reached the summit of his ambition on a pine-branch over them, emitted a shrill, triumphant chatter for their benefit.

"I shall talk with Whitcot, and something must

be done. We will confer this afternoon," said Archdale.

"I want to see you alone again, too," Burlen said. "There is something else — something partly connected with this — I would like you to know."

XIX.

HOW BURLIN SURPRISED ARCHDALE.

THE professor allowed his sudden arrival to be taken as a duplicate of his first unexpected coming, and Whitcot was careful not to betray the fact that he had known of it in advance.

Archdale drew him aside. "I want to ask you a question or two," he said, leading the way to the clump of cherry-trees encircling that little, rocky outdoor study whither Burlen had often resorted.

"Ah?" said the engineer politely, on his guard.

"About this affair of Burlen's sister. How much do you know about the girl you suppose is she?"

"He has told you, then?" inquired Whitcot, in his turn. "Well, I know very little about her." Then he regretted the admission, and became reserved.

"Good, so far! I'm afraid, though, that you were rash in suggesting the idea to my young friend before ascertaining decisively whether the person known as — Ida Hiss, is it? — bears her own name or not. What was your object?"

"I—I—well, in short, I supposed he would want to know."

"So," was the older man's comment. "So;" given in a not very reassuring tone.

Whitcot assumed the contrite. "I'm sorry if I made a mistake," he said. "I presume you knew already about Burlin's — ah —" here his voice conveyed a delicate shade of considerateness for an ugly subject — "Burlin's circumstances, since you seem quite prepared for this subject."

"Certainly, Robert is my friend; I possess his confidence."

"Oh, well, if I had known that, I could have communicated to you, first, what I had found out."

Archdale was well impressed, but replied pertinently: "Excuse me, but I understand that you have not *found out* anything."

"Quite right, sir. No; I should have said my surmises." Civil-engineer Whitcot began to suspect that he had something much harder to do than mechanical drawing, before he could consider himself a success.

"As you say," proceeded Archdale, "it would have been proper to come to me with a guess. As it is, you have been a little hasty. However, we want to clear up the matter, and I shall expect your co-operation. Can't you arrange for an interview between myself and the girl?"

"I will try."

"It should take place quite privately, you understand, of course."

"Of course. There's plenty of privacy — plenty of solitude round here." Whether from some chance recollection of that night-pursuit of Rudyard's, or from a sense of failure closing in upon him, or some

general vague foreboding, Whitcot shivered slightly in making this reply.

"If you can influence her," said Archdale, "try to bring her to such a point that one interview will suffice."

"I don't know of any influence to bring to bear, except through Timothy Pride."

"What, the farmer's son? What possible influence can he have?"

"That I can't tell you, sir. Accidentally it has come to my knowledge that he has more or less power over her; and it might be worth while to try to avail ourselves of it."

"Very well. See what you can do, and then let me know, if you please."

And there, for the time being, they left the coil half unwound. But Whitcot had an uncomfortable conviction, that, as fast as one end was unwound, it laid hold of and tightened around him, and that it might eventually trip him up.

In accordance with his promise that they would confer together, Archdale strolled down the glen with Burlen, in the afternoon, and told him how he had deputed Whitcot to arrange a meeting with Ida. Burlen had something still more momentous to impart. He had prepared himself to tell Edith's father what was in his heart, and to ask Archdale's sanction to his at least putting the decision of his happiness into Edith's hands. But in order to do this he felt that he must also be prepared to have his whole

past put before her. Archdale had trusted him, and should be made to see clearly that his trust had been well placed. If he judged, as he doubtless would, that the preliminary to a marriage proposal ought to be a full understanding on Edith's part in regard to the conditions of his life, past and present, Burlen made up his mind to accept that decision. To do this required no mean effort, but he saw that honor and manliness demanded it: a crisis had come, and he could not permit himself to shrink from the duties it involved.

"I have thought it all over, Dr. Archdale," he began slowly, "and I have chosen this as the best time to speak of a — a subject very important to me. But before I say what I wish to, I must ask you not to think me too confident, or to imagine that I mean to take your kindness in my present trouble as pledging you to a still greater kindness." His hands turned cold as he uttered these deliberate words without any appearance of unusual agitation.

"I don't quite guess what you are at," replied Archdale, mystified; "but I think you may rely on me not to misinterpret you."

The good gentleman did not see what was coming, and his inadequate manner made Burlen's inward discomposure still harder to bear. "Has n't it occurred to you," the young man asked, fixing his deep eyes on Archdale, "that there may be a reason for my wishing not to be humiliated before people by having the dishonor of my family fastened on me again — a reason, I mean, much stronger than my own personal mortification?"

"Certainly, Robert; a very much stronger one, — that of the prejudice and unfair difficulty it might throw in the way of your career, the usefulness of which I expect to be great. Yes, I've thought of that. I thought we had discussed it. Haven't we discussed all the reasons, before?"

"Not this one." It was a rough spot where they stood, and the trees around them sprang up at unwonted angles, owing to the unevenness of the ground. It seemed to Burlen that these trees, poised in such a peculiar way about him, had begun to stagger. He put out his hand to touch one, and as he felt the contact of its rough bark, he said: "The reason I refer to is — I love Edith."

Then his eyes fell.

If the solid hickory by which Burlen steadied himself had actually given way, instead of only seeming to him just ready to do so, Archdale could hardly have been more stunned than he was, for a moment, by this announcement. He was unable to speak, at first. An unreasoning anger choked him, — anger with himself, with Burlen, and even with his sister Grace for having foreseen so much. But this passed, and the Archdale of every day — the man of polish, the sound theologian, possessor of a well-trained heart — recovered himself. "I wish," he said in a tone of criticism, but not harshly, "that you had at least postponed this statement. Does n't it strike you that there is a trace of impropriety in making it just at this time?"

"Yes," was the unexpected answer. "And yet

I chose my time." Then Burlen seemed to pass through a swift change. He cried out, in a tone that was new to his listener: "Impropriety? Yes, I was born in an impropriety, brought up in one! It's an impropriety that I should be in the toils of this wretched mystery surrounding my sister. Must I unmake, remake, everything before I come to you to confide this secret, as I once did the black one that has been almost life-long? Perhaps I must n't allow myself to think of Edith: I have considered that. That may be an impropriety, too, — the crowning one." But in uttering her name his tumultuous manner was checked, and he manifested a reverence that impressed Archdale more than any impassioned appeal could have done. "But even if I am to stop thinking of her in this way, I must love her just the same. I wanted to learn whether you would deny me the right to hope. You know my story; you are my only friend; you are her father. If you oppose, I will submit: she shall never hear a syllable from me — unnatural though I might think it. But if you were to countenance my suit at all, it would have to be in the face of this thing that is still unsettled and darkens my path."

"There is something brave and right in what you say, Robert," the other admitted with sorrowful frankness.

"I'm glad you look at my motive in that way. But of course that is not the same as giving me liberty to speak. Do you feel that you can't do so?"

"It is hard to answer at once. How long has this — ah — this idea — been in your mind?"

"Longer than I know, I suppose. But it is only lately that I recognized it beyond doubt, and saw that my whole future was wrapped up in it."

"Let us leave it for the present," Archdale proposed, hesitating.

"I would rather not, sir. If you feel an opposition to the thought that is very hard to overcome, I had better know it at once."

"In any case," continued Archdale, still temporizing, "you could hardly approach Edith on such a theme until after you had solved the problem which has taken shape in the person of Ida Hiss."

Burlen turned his eyes away wearily. It was a severe strain upon him to subject emotions sacred, delicate, and hitherto untarnished by any one's handling, to this process of weights and measures. "No," he said, "I would not wish to. Besides, I want to lay the facts of my life before her, in any case, for her to view as she will, before I ask her —"

"Wait a moment, Robert. You may want to reconsider that. I appreciate the excellence of your purpose in so planning. But it may be caused by over-loyalty to me."

"I think not, sir."

"Well, on general grounds, I advise against it." Unconsciously, Archdale had already, drawn on by the younger man's sturdy sincerity, thrown himself into his position, and was planning what course would

be best for him in presenting his suit. "There is no real need of your embarrassing yourself in that way. If it should really be the case that Edith" — he pulled up suddenly, seeing how far he had gone, but gallantly resumed — "that Edith cared for you, the narration of past events would come more naturally after some assurance of that fact, than before."

A look of gladness brightened in Burlin's face.

"Perhaps you are right," he answered. "But you are speaking almost as if you were reconciled to what I wish."

Archdale did what, ten minutes earlier, he would have thought impossible: he smiled. "I believe I am," he said candidly. "I hardly knew it; but somehow you have won me over, I think. It was nothing in you, Robert, that made me hesitate at first. You know that. After all, I don't see why I should stand between two young lives, if they grow naturally together."

"I can't tell you how much your goodness does for me," the candidate responded, lifted into a calm ecstasy by this favorable result.

"You accept my advice, then?" the professor queried, punctiliously. "You see that it is better to leave reminiscences until afterward?"

"Let me think a moment," said Burlin.

Formerly he had been the one to request a postponement; now it was Archdale who counselled it. His instinct had been to let Edith know everything, before asking her to be his wife; but possibly that was a crude idea, since it did not recommend itself

to Archdale. It might not be at all fitting to preface his proposal with a long and painful story. Then, there were other considerations. Our relations in life seem, at times, to be merely groupings, which endure because they are effective and convenient, or unavoidable like the chain-gang in prisons, inevitable to sufferers under a common doom of disappointment. Only at times, I say, do they strike us in this way. But it is undeniable that many of our dearest and apparently firmest ties may be dissolved, at the least seriously modified, if one of the parties to them shall be presented to the other in a suddenly altered light; not necessarily a light due to a fatal misdeed, but simply some difference of opinion, some flaw of temper, some episode of the past unexpectedly made known and not fully understood. Such a light, falling unexpectedly, often changes a person's whole aspect in the eyes of another, and causes grave consequences, though the person in question may not have been seriously at fault nor even blameworthy at all. Regarded in this way, our mundane unions of friendship, love, and society become like experiments in *chiaroscuro*, constantly thrown aside or neglected in the hope that something more nearly perfect will be arrived at. If this can be so in unions already formed, the risk is still greater when a man appears suddenly before the woman to whom he is about to declare his love, in a surrounding of rough and disenchanting fact wholly different from what she has grown used to associating with him.

Something of all this Burlen had observed during

his progress through the world, and now reviewed. Edith was to him the fulfilment, in tangible form, of that higher existence to which he had dedicated himself; towards which he had slowly striven over volcanic slopes of fire and tumult and destructive upheaval. He had risen toilsomely, by the force of an aspiration and of faculties which God had given him, out of squalid depths up to her joyous and more blessed plane. Would it not be more just, therefore, to win his way further even as he had begun?

"You seem to be in great doubt," observed Archdale, who had watched the strong, brown, sensitive face during that pause of absent reverie.

"No; I am in doubt no longer. It must be best as you say. I think I will wait about telling her, — unless, of course, this girl is really Thyrsa." And again, for an instant, Burlin's expression became one of anxious pain.

The tone of life at the farm was insensibly deepening. All those who sat down to tea that evening in the homely old dining-room, which the young people had nicknamed Gobble Hall, were occupied with hopes and sentiments, fears, anxieties, and weighty life-plans, excepting Mrs. Savland. Yet there was no lack of mirth. The conversation was light and amusing. There was youth enough in the party to overcome all shadows of care and the slumbering tides of solemn passion. Ravling, unlike Burlin, had the art of separating himself from his own affairs, or from what was going on around him, —

even though it might be cutting him to the quick, — so far as to regard all that happened as part of a strange and entertaining, albeit an occasionally tragic, show. This made him a good story-teller. Odd experiences had befallen him, and he wrought them all into a continuous drama full of surprises, of wit and humor, sometimes of simple beauty and deep reflection, from which he drew at will to please his friends. Nearly every one liked him, in consequence ; and on this particular evening he appeared so well that an impartial authority might have pronounced him a dangerous rival to Burlen. I suspect that Edith really had some momentary compunctions for her discouraging treatment of him.

Burlen, however, could not repress his hopefulness. He had gained so much in this one day, that it seemed impossible he should not continue and reach the acme of his desires. Before the moon rose, they were all called out to look at a camp-fire burning on Monadnoc, — a spectacle which to them was an important event. The scene was glorious, and the whole party were hushed by it. Great masses of rising and falling ground rolled themselves towards Monadnoc in a gloom of woods, deep-hued as a starless sky ; but the real heavens hung blue-black above this expanse, full of pale glittering lights. Dusk on dusk, the mountain heaped its giant limbs high against the stars ; and half way up its bold acclivity the small spot of the camp-fire shone like a fierce eye looking to the southward, so that Monadnoc seemed even more than by daylight a potent, living presence.

There was a vague murmur in the air of little brooks that one might fancy had lost their way in the darkness and were whispering together how they should get home. As Burlen stood there, near Edith, a song-sparrow disturbed in her rest uttered from her nest, in the ink-black trees by the road, a sudden, soft twitter, lazy and remote as a sound in dreams. In Burlen there awoke a gladness that responded with good accord to that sweet note, as he recalled how he had now put into articulate words the passion that possessed him. But when he should speak to Edith, it would no longer be like a sound in a dream.

XX.

A MEETING IN THE DESERT.

THE more that Whitcot lost confidence in the plausibility of entangling Burlen in ties of relationship with a girl who assuredly could not be considered a desirable sister-in-law, the more resolute he became in effecting some embarrassment which should delay his rival's progress with Edith.

There were elements in the young engineer, different though his breeding was from that of the strange child of night who had flitted by a seeming accident into his life, which responded involuntarily to her unfettered, dangerous nature. Argue as you will from the strength of refining association, these tendencies of downward affinity will be found in places where, until one has learned to search deeper than all prejudice or theory, they seem least likely to occur. They perhaps denote in the cultivated nature an unconscious remembrance of something lower, from which it has risen by gradual stages, through many generations.

In Ida Hiss, Whitcot had encountered a living type of the lower sort, still undeveloped; and although there had been something repellent in his first chance association with her, she also exercised a species of uncanny fascination over him. Now that he had

been drawn into fixing upon her as an instrument in a plot to forward his own ends, he felt the force of this more controllingly, notwithstanding that he still failed to take due account of it. Being commissioned by Archdale to deal further with her, he was obliged to see her again. The negotiation did not proceed altogether satisfactorily. Arguments had to be used. He cajoled, he flattered her. He tried to persuade her that she would gain in Timothy's regard if she could rise, even for a short time, to the position of Burlen's sister. And in doing all this he dropped into a familiar relation, tinged with a tawdry affectation of gallantry, not very creditable and still less prudent, since it exposed him to Rudyard's suspicion and dislike.

She agreed to come to a rendezvous with Archdale and Burlen at a sheltered spot just above the desert; but he could get from her no intimation as to what she would do when there. Possibly she herself did not know. Even this much was accomplished only by the intervention of Timothy Pride. When the assistance of that young man was asked, he replied: "You want to find out suthin' from Idy? Well, I tell you, Mr. Whitcot, it ain't no go. She's as sharp as the little end o' nothin'!"

Whitcot had not confided to him what they wished to find out; but the young fellow none the less used his best endeavor to contrive the meeting. These preliminaries occupied two days, but at last the appointed time drew near.

The engineer told the two persons most interested

how the interview was to take place; and when the hour came, Archdale and Burlen separately made their escape unobserved from the house and chose slightly circuitous routes to the place that had been named. The engineer had to wait for Timothy, who was bringing up to the barn some saplings which his father and he had been trimming for wagon-poles. Unluckily Ann Fernlow had just come with her mother to see Mrs. Pride, and Timothy—who had been more devoted to the bashful little maiden since her success at the levee—gave indications of wishing to remain near her. He drove slowly up with his load of wagon-poles, singing his accustomed song, which had the merit of containing only two lines; so that by varying the number of repetitions it could be lengthened or diminished at will, and made to fit exactly the extent of any drive, whether long or short.

“I’d ra—ther be with Ro-sa-bel,
A-swing—ing in—the lane!”

he roared, with all the vigor of his robustly insensible lungs. Then, after vague intermediate humming, he would reiterate his desire to be with Rosabel.

“I don’t doubt you’d rather be,” growled Whitcot, under his breath, standing near the gate; “but we can’t allow it, just at present.”

The wagon was unloaded, and then Timothy deliberately went to join his Rosabel, who, under the guise of Ann Fernlow, was standing by the kitchen door with the two elder women. “Come, Timo-

thy!" Whitcot hailed him. "I'm ready to go out with you now and set those traps in the woods." This was to be their ostensible errand.

"All right. I want to talk to Ann and her mother a spell, first," returned the youth, doggedly.

"Hurry up, then!"

But it was not an easy matter to get him away from the shy little maiden. Finally Whitcot started off slowly into the road, whistling with a fierce facility that conveyed in the strongest terms his growing impatience. This indirect appeal moved Timothy, and he began to follow, but only to turn back once more.

"Oh, Ann!" he bawled, with affectionate energy. "I had suthin' I was goin' to tell you, an' I most forgot it."

Ann twisted the forefinger of her left hand with her timid little right one, by way of intimating that she was all attention, and glanced out at him from under her bent hat.

"*They* want me," said Timothy, jerking his head descriptively towards that part of the house occupied by the summer-boarders, "to drive one o' the teams to Monadnoc when they go. There'll be room on it for you."

Ann looked quickly at her mother, who nodded.

"What say? Will you go?" demanded Timothy.

"Yes, long as mother says I may," the girl answered, — inaccurately, since her mother had not uttered a syllable. But she was blushing with gratification, and that satisfied her suitor.

"All right. I'll tell you, when we're goin'," he remarked, with an assumed air of regarding it strictly as a business matter, and having no sentimental interest in it whatever. But he really found in the little attention he had just offered a balm to ease his conscience for the deception he was guilty of in going to see Ida Hiss once more. His meetings with Ida hitherto had been actuated on his part solely by sedate curiosity, and rendered mildly agreeable by the knowledge that she had what seemed an extravagant liking for him. At present he was going to see her merely to oblige Mr. Whitcot, and was firmly resolved to have nothing more to do with her.

Burlen having arrived first at the trysting-place had seated himself on the thick, short grass under the spreading boughs of a linden, the other half of which overhung the sand. The tree was still full of life and beauty, although the desert had begun its fatal assault by banking sand up around the bole. On the grass where the young candidate sat were scattered scores of seed-sacks from the branches above, each one a disk-shape provided with a small green wing on one side, by means of which the wind could waft it away to some final lodgment, far from any one's ken, where it would either take root or wither fruitlessly into dust. Little emblems of fate they seemed, to Burlen; and as he waited here for the interview fraught with so many possible consequences, the sharp contrast of the hot sand-acres on one side of him with the cool and shadowed greenness on the other became typical of the junction be-

tween opposing forces in his career, which was just now taking place. From his revery over these things he was roused by Archdale's arrival; and they were soon afterward joined by Whitcot and his reluctant agent.

"Where can the young woman be?" queried the professor, looking about.

"I can't imagine," said Whitcot, nervous with so much delay. "It's considerably past the time when she ought to have got here."

While they were staring in all directions for some sign of her approach, they heard a low, contralto-toned laugh, which seemed to come out of the sand-heaps close by. They turned in astonishment, and there was Ida emerging from a hollow between two of the low crests of the desert-tract, where she had crouched in effectual concealment. She wore no hat, even in the warm sunlight that had been beating on her there. With her shining black hair, her rich, deep complexion, and clear red lips exposed to the full afternoon glow, — her vivid, careless vitality contrasting with the haunting misery that never was absent from her expression, — she rose upon Archdale and Burlen like an embodiment of the desolation in which she stood at that instant; a life that had sprung all at once out of lifeless matter; a creature having human form and human traits, but not yet quite freed from the encumbering weight of that lower and more savage nature from which she had risen.

"I've seen every one of you come," she said, without waiting for any question. "I was here all the time." She stepped out on to the grass and

faced the farmer-lad. "Timothy Pride, what do *you* want here?"

"Any harm in my wantin' to see you?" he retorted, with the comfortable sulkiness of indifference. "You allus pretended you was sot on me, before."

"I don't want to see you with these men," she said, glancing contemptuously at the others. "You didn't say you was going to be here. You asked me to come and talk to 'em, and I came because you asked."

"Well, I did it a-puppuss," Timothy declared, becoming belligerent. "I want you to tell me what I asked you so many times a'ready, — just where you come from and who your folks be. *They* want to know, and so do I; and that's why we come together. See?"

The strange girl turned imperiously to Archdale. "Send him away!" she commanded, pointing at Timothy. She had not waited for any introduction to the venerable and scandalized professor.

He, however, was resolved to be conciliatory at all cost. Persuading the farmer's son to walk away out of hearing, and contemplate a group of white birches in the near distance, he then, with some sternness, addressed Ida. "Now let us be reasonable, if you please," he began. After this he set the case before her in courteous phrases, from his own point of view. Mr. Burlen had a sister who had left her home, and so on; rumors had arisen; greatly obliged if she would enlighten them; and so on, and so on. "In fact it is your duty," he wound up, "if

you are not this lost sister, or have no knowledge of her, to state as much at once and put an end to all doubt."

His eminently proper appeal made no discernible impression. "I sha'n't tell you anything about myself," she said. "I don't know that I'm anybody's sister. Have n't you heard my name? Ida Hiss is what folks call me, round here. If you've all a mind to tell me something about your families, perhaps I'll tell you about mine. But I won't promise. Suppose we all sit down and tell stories," she suggested, with an air of joyless amusement. Archdale turned away from her in despair, shocked and disconcerted. He had already made up his mind that she had no claim on his former pupil, whoever she might be. Then she turned to Burlen, with a half sinister smile. "Do I look like your sister?" she asked him. "If you want to treat me like a sister and be nice to me, you can. It would be real fun!"

It had been a part of Archdale's prescribed policy that Burlen should make no strenuous appeal to her; that he should notice her, indeed, as little as possible, and leave her to take her own course. But this partly insolent, partly coquettish sally of hers, together with her piercing and inscrutable gaze, bewildered the young man. He could not actually believe her to be his sister; but the mixed current of pity, longing, and terror that fretted against his heart was hard to resist.

"I shall never treat you as a sister," he said in a voice profoundly sad, which seemed to echo itself in

a tremulous ringing tone, though he uttered each word distinctly, "until I find that it is right to do so. If you proved yourself my sister, no one should be to you what I would."

He looked directly into her eyes while speaking, and for a moment afterwards. She returned his look; but it was a mutual gaze which neither would have been anxious, just then, to repeat. Who can tell what dark abyss he explored, in those few seconds, or what terrifying height of spirituality she discerned in him? There was a still and awful passion in their discovery of the distance between them; perhaps as when a star looks down into some black tarn of earth, millions of miles below, and the dark waters, looking up, tremblingly reflect the star.

She made no immediate answer, and Burlen turned his gaze away and receded a few steps, as if that trying scrutiny had exhausted him.

But the girl had been shaken, influenced. For a second or two a light shone in her eyes which might have betokened some important resolution. She glanced at Timothy, who stood a few rods away with his back turned, and then at Burlen, as if she were weighing the consideration that Whitcot had lately suggested to her. So he at least fancied, leaning with folded arms against the linden-trunk and observing her.

"What would you do if I really was your sister?" she inquired of the young theologian, after a pause. "Would you think as much of me as you do of those ladies up at the farm, mebbe? Would I have dresses

like them? How do you suppose *they* would like it? How do you suppose they would treat me?" But by the time she finished she had broken into a quiet laugh of derision, which she seemed to direct against herself as well as against other people in general, and the ladies referred to in particular.

Burlen looked up again. The other two men instinctively withdrew a few paces.

"Are you Thyrsa?" demanded the unfortunate young man, with agonized entreaty. "If you are, tell me some little thing that will show it! You mustn't be afraid. You don't know how I searched for my sister, for years. I don't believe you are she, or else you could n't see me in such suspense without telling me positively. Do you remember the little pool where we used to play, and where my father used to wet the wheels sometimes, when he was putting new iron around them? It was near the shop, just along the road. O Thyrsa! I remember I ran after her, that very day when she left us for the last time, and asked her if she would be back soon!" Tears forced themselves into Burlen's eyes. The girl bent her face aside, so that he could not see it, — whether because she was really moved or only wearied with the scene, it was impossible for him to tell. "Wait!" he cried. "Did you ever have a breast-pin made of your mother's hair, — a small pin made like a shield?" He paused an instant: it seemed to him that he heard a suppressed sob from the girl before him. But she made no answer. "Very well," he suddenly resumed, with forced com-

posure. "I see. If you were Thyrsa, I'm sure you would say something when I reminded you of mother."

Ida confronted him again, half fiercely, with no trace of emotion in her face. "You wouldn't want to have your sister back, even if you did find her!" she exclaimed, passionately. "I know very well how it would be. You'd despise her. Why do you go on, this way? Haven't you had enough of talking to me? Let's stop this."

Burlen drew back, despairing, yet with a sense of relief. Archdale, growing impatient, returned to the attack and made one more effort; but Ida only smiled disdainfully at him, and vouchsafed no reply. Then Whitcot, seeing that no progress was being made, brought Timothy forward again.

The girl warned him off, as he approached. Then, on his advancing, she began to go further away, and mounted the low sandy ridge behind her. He followed, alone, leaving the rest in the background. "You've got to settle this to suit 'em," he asserted, in matter-of-fact tones, "before you go away. Else I sha'n't marry you, nor have nothin' more to do with you."

She frowned and shook her finger at him. "You're a wicked little boy, Timothy," she said. "What do you mean? What is it to you?"

"I don't know's I sh'd have anythin' more to do with you any way," he replied. "But then I promised that managin' engineer, or whatever he is, that I'd tell ye this. So there!"

"That Whitcot? What a fool he is! Oh, I remember well enough," she continued, addressing the engineer, though he was beyond reach of her voice, "how you asked me, that first time I saw you, whether I could be afraid of you. And so you thought I would, did you?—Listen, Timothy: he'll find out his mistake. There's some one else *he'd* better be afraid of! Timothy, you did wrong to make me come up here; and now I've done it for you, you're cruel and mean, and don't treat me well. You like that little 'fraid-cat, Ann Fernlow, better than you do me. Well, go along to her, then." The farmer's son appeared quite willing to obey this injunction; but she pulled him by the sleeve as he began to move away from her. "You won't forget me for always, will you, Timothy?" she asked, in sudden earnest, and betraying a kind of humility.

He shook her hand off. "Don't touch me!" he said, with plain, prosaic testiness.

She recoiled as if more hurt than she would like to admit. Then, all at once, waving her hand to the three who stood further off under the linden boughs: "Good-by, folks!" she cried. "I'm sorry you did n't bring those ladies to see me, too."

Timothy came back to them, indolently observing: "You might's well whistle psalm-tunes to a dead horse as talk to *her!*" (In strict accuracy, what he said sounded like "Sam tunes.")

Archdale was moving forward to enter an appeal against this tantalizing close of the interview which was to have been so conclusive, when he was arrested

by the sound of several people coming towards them through the adjacent wood, and recognized the voices of Edith and Viola in conversation with Ravling. In another instant these new arrivals — carrying bows, quivers, and a target — stepped out into the grassy opening near the linden, and halted in amazement at the disconnected and incongruous group which they beheld there.

“Schucky!” exclaimed Timothy, and immediately made good his retreat over the bank of the desert.

“How strange you all seem, papa!” said Edith, coming nearer. “Who is that woman there?”

“Some one Timothy has been talking with,” said her father, making an effort to appear perfectly collected.

“But why did he run away so? He told us you were all going to be here, and so we brought our archery. But it took us so long to find it!”

“Oh, he told you, did he?” Whitcot asked, with innocent surprise. “Well, let’s begin.”

“Are you all tired out with waiting?” Viola inquired, in a singing tone and with a brilliant smile, as if to indicate that *she* never became tired.

“How that woman watches us!” Edith whispered to her father, uneasily.

“We shall have to make a target of her,” Ravling declared jocosely, overhearing this.

But Ida, having scanned them all to her satisfaction, was now ready to go. Without further demonstration, she walked along the edge of the sand, ascended a little knoll at the end of it, where some

tall white birches grew in an airy clump together, and stood there, briefly looking back at the rest, as if she were a sorceress who was satisfied with casting a spell over them from a distance. Then she vanished.

Laughing at her singular behavior, Ravling set up the target, and the archery practice began; Burlen and the professor taking no share in it. In a few moments there came floating up from the glen below the desert a sturdy voice, keyed to the familiar strain: —

“I’d rather be with Ro-sa-bel.”

This ditty was repeated a few times, and then died away. After a while, they heard the same voice calling to the cattle: “Bossy, bossy, bossy, bossy! Coo, coo, coo!” And again, further off: “Bossy — bossy — bossy!” It formed a grotesque closing strain to the unique parley which had just taken place, yet it resounded in the vast silence of declining afternoon, and in this lonely spot, with a mournfulness that struck Burlen. To him it seemed as if everything, even the most prosaic occurrence, took on a shade of the tragic among these solemn hills.

When the party got ready to go, he contrived to pass near enough to Whitcot for a moment to mutter in his ear, “If Timothy told the others we were going to be here, there is only one person who could have given him the hint.”

The engineer did not flinch nor change expression. But his very self-possession condemned him, in Burlen’s opinion. It seemed altogether probable that he

had intended to bring about a theatrical surprise, which, had Ida acknowledged herself the theologian's sister, would have led to an abrupt disclosure before the entire assemblage of friends.

"Well, Robert," said Archdale, when they were alone, "it seems to have come to nothing. What is your opinion about the girl?"

"It seems less likely to me now, than at any time since the notion was broached, that she can be Thyrsa. At least, I shall repudiate it entirely from now on until she chooses to bring positive proof."

"Quite right!" nodded the professor, cheerfully. "I think you may consider yourself free."

And he knew how much that phrase meant to Burlen.

XXI.

THE CROWN OF MONADNOC.

A LIGHT rain set in the next day after the scene which has just been described, and caused the inmates of Pride's to postpone for another twenty-four hours the drive to Monadnoc and the ascent to its summit, which they had been planning.

It was now late in August, and the half-circle of peaks at the head of the valley, which marked the shading of one season into another by the slow changes of their hues, had grown yellow and brown with sun-burnt pastures and ripening harvests on their lower slopes. The green of the woods, too, began to dim and to yield, here and there, to russet tarnishings, small patches of faint gold, or touches of *bizarre* crimson at rare intervals. The excursion to the mountain-top came as a culmination of the holiday sojourn. It would not be long before the little group of friends and rivals would disperse again. Nothing had yet been done by the Second Church in regard to securing Burlen as its pastor, the congregation being still agreeably occupied in trying one preacher after another; but he did not feel inclined to stay at Pride's, awaiting their decision. Ravling, likewise, was inwardly hearkening to

the call of legal business, which was already summoning him back to Boston.

Yet the lawyer found it hard to fix upon an unalterable date for returning. It must not be supposed from the hints of a growing interest in Miss Viola which we have noticed, that his mood had radically changed with regard to Edith. All that he had said to her at Marle he still felt; but he was at a loss to conceive how that subject could ever come up between them again until after a longer period than had yet elapsed. Still he waited near her, vaguely feeling that something more definite than had thus far occurred ought to happen before he could leave her vicinity. Mrs. Savland, to whom her niece had confided nothing of Ravling's twice-made proposal, had now put Whitcot into the second place on her books, and was very desirous of a match with the lawyer, — not for herself, but merely for herself through Edith. She found herself unable to do anything important towards it, but she lent herself to the cause of detaining Ravling.

During this day of leisure Edith was busy with unsatisfied mental inquiries concerning the mysterious young woman whom she had seen apparently conversing with Timothy in the presence of her father, Burlen, and Whitcot. She had afterwards recalled her face as that of the waitress at the hotel, whom she had seen standing in the court-yard with the engineer, — a thing she had thought very singular at the time. Could it be that something was going on in regard to this girl which had not been confided

to her? Burlen's preoccupation, approaching dejection, as he sat silent under the linden-tree during the archery game, had not escaped her; and if there was a secret, it did not seem a very great leap of inference to conclude that the secret affected him. Being utterly in the dark as to his troubles, however, she could not guess how it could affect him. Having got thus far in her meditations, it suddenly occurred to Edith to ask herself whether, were the secret Ravling's or Whitcot's, she would pay so much attention to it as she was now doing. Her conscience promptly answered "No."

This led to a haughty little resolve that she would not give the matter another thought; and thereupon she began to think about it more than ever. "I do wish he would tell me about himself," she finally said. She began to regard his reticence as a personal injury.

"The sky looks kind o' scurried up," Mrs. Pride informed them, that evening, on taking a hasty meteorological observation before closing the house-door for the night. But the morning dawned fair, and the atmosphere was fresher for the recent showers. The drowsy premises soon became noisy with the bustle of preparation. Mrs. Pride twitched her face a great deal, and kept exploding with exclamations of anxiety and impatience as she hurried about, getting the luncheon. The cellar-door not "jagging" to her satisfaction, she lifted it quietly off its hinges and laid it against the wall. Timothy became

breathless with his labors in currying and harnessing the horses, and in attending to his mother's demands for help ; but she considered it a point of propriety that he should not be allowed to rest for an instant. "Come, you can't sit there sucking your claws all day !" she cried, when he incautiously dropped down upon a chair, with nothing more to do. "Go and get me a jug for this cold coffee." Bolting into the rusty outer kitchen to obey her behest, he stumbled upon the three rivals democratically blacking their own boots with as much vigor as if their success and happiness for life depended on outdoing one another in the splendor of their polish. Everybody, in fact, was busy.

Viola was wrapping herself in veils, as if she were a water-color study which might fade if exposed carelessly to the sunlight. Edith took care to arm herself with a favorite book, to be read in some cosey perch of the rocks, but really destined to remain forgotten in her pocket all day ; and Mrs. Savland packed a small reticule with linen bandages, smelling-salts, and witch-hazel, in gloomy foreboding of accidents which refused to occur. Only Archdale, who had strapped a field-glass over his shoulder for the views, paced up and down in exaggerated calm, trying to counterbalance the undue confusion into which the rest had fallen.

Mr. Pride had already taken his place on one of the wagons, when the excursionists came out ; but in deference to the society of ladies he promptly spat out a chip of wood which he had been chewing to

curb his restlessness. Then there ensued a careful stowing away of baskets and pails; and Timothy watched with astonishment the number of light cloaks and shawls, and the air-cushion and camp-stool, which Mrs. Savland insisted on carrying. Edith wore a costume of plain dark-blue, with glintings of silvered buttons and narrow silver braid here and there. Her only ornament was a necklace of small amber beads. This met with critical approbation from Timothy; but the other ladies struck him as too elaborate. He preferred Ann Fernlow, in her modest figured gingham, — especially since the gingham was in close proximity to himself, and he could look into the wearer's face without embarrassment, because her eyes drooped so shyly that she did not see any part of Timothy above the hand in which he held the reins. At last they started; and Ann began to waver to and fro with the jolting of the wheels over rough places, like the sober grasses in a field, swaying gently to the breeze.

"Are you a very careful driver, Timothy?" inquired Archdale, becoming suddenly thoughtful after a severe downward thump and abrupt turn while they were still descending the first hill.

"I can team it better than dad," the youth declared boastfully, feeling the stimulus of Ann's presence. "Of course," he continued in an injured tone, "he wanted to go first so's to make it safer; and may be 't is, for if he was behind us I would n't insure this here tool-cart on no terms. You'd see him come shootin' down on us somewheres just like a

— a telescope.” Timothy chose this word from an impression that it had a good deal to do with railroad collisions.

“Is he so bad a driver as that?” asked the old gentleman, much concerned for his sister, who was supercargo of the other wagon.

“No, he ain’t a bad driver; but I can beat him. I dared him once to do what I did, — drive a horse in an open buggy up the hill back o’ Major Brown’s cider-mill; and he would n’t. Why, it’s so steep there, — there ain’t any road, you know, — that afore the horse got to the top he could look right over his ears an’ see his own back. Easy, too.”

“I hardly see how that could be possible,” remarked the professor, feeling that he must hereafter observe equine anatomy with particular care.

“Well,” said Timothy with scrupulous exactness, “I don’ know but that special horse was a leetle mite cross-eyed.”

“Ah, yes; perhaps that would explain it,” Archdale said musingly.

He tried to appear unconcerned; but during a good part of their long drive he was in momentary expectation, when they passed any unenclosed slope, of seeing Timothy charge it with his horses like a battery of artillery suddenly ordered into action.

Monadnoc, that morning, had resolved itself from the slight cloudiness of the day before into its usual hue, — a deep aluminous blue, letting the eye sink into recesses of color seemingly endless; and the rich brown and yellow of some coreopsis flowers, rising

on long stalks from a low swell of ground near the road, were thrown against it like knots of gold embossed on a surface of *lapis lazuli*. But as they drew nearer it changed. The glory of distance melted away into forms and colors that showed the mountain as it really was, — a part of the every-day world, but gathering the ordinary elements composing that into a grandeur which made of them something superior, and almost lifted them into a new order of material. Yet the unity of its whole mass, which gave it such a solid serenity and so reposeful an effect when seen from afar, suffered in some degree under this closer scrutiny. To come from looking at it in a long aerial perspective to contemplating it here, was like suddenly meeting an old friend whom one has known in the prime of life, and finding his face stricken and scarred with age and sorrow. Among the thick woods banked upon its sides rude ledges of rock showed through in some places, with a dead ashy tint. Even the trunks and branches of the trees in the white sunlight that brought out the dry gray of their bark, made the skeleton of the forest quite as prominent as its covering; the unreckoned myriads of leaves seemed to have alighted on the limbs only to rest a while before departing again with the quick flight of the New England summer. And for a brief space while he could regard the mountainous mass at a particular angle, with its rough features gathered together in a particular way, Burlen was startled at the aspect of hard, immovable agony in which it presented itself

to him. The next moment the soft sky above it, full of dim white convolutions of cloud that hung motionless or dissolved imperceptibly, gave it a benignant and peaceful air. A bird was seen flying over it in the sunny ether, as if it were nothing so very terrible or significant after all. Birds were singing in the green hiding-places about it, treating it familiarly. Then the wagons passed through a gate on the road, to begin winding up towards a small hotel on the other side of the mountain; and Monadnoc from this point was transformed into a great, cheerful mound, decked with waving festival boughs.

“What’s the gate for?” asked Viola.

“It’s to keep the mounting from strayin’ into anybody’s pastur’,” said Timothy. “That’s all.”

They had started early; so that when they came to the hotel, at the end of the wagon-road, it was agreed to make the climb to the crest before lunching. Viola and Whitcot at once moved forward on the rough path that led thither, stirred by a desire to be the first to reach the top; Burlen and Edith, chancing to be near together, followed. This left Ravling in the position of having to offer his services to Mrs. Savland, as Archdale hesitated to attempt the rather arduous ascent. Miss Viola, with a tin flower-case fastened at her waist, looked like a Diana with a cartridge-box, and trudged ahead at a speed equally appropriate to the fleet huntress. She soon disappeared with her escort along the rising way that passed under a continuous canopy of young trees;

and as Mrs. Savland moved at a slow pace in the rear, Burlen was left in enviable solitude with Edith. The mountain-side was full of delightful sounds. They heard the liquid trill of the wood-pigeon and the distant, hushed babble of running water. A red squirrel scampered across their course at one point, and at another when they sat down to rest on a convenient flat slab of stone, the rich, low murmur of wild bees accompanied their talk with an enchanting undertone.

They gained an open plateau strown with tumbled fragments from the topmost ridge that rose abruptly above it; and from here on, the real climb from rock to rock beginning, Burlen had to give Edith his hand more than once. They had hitherto seldom even shaken hands; and whenever they had done so it was always with a light, escaping touch on Edith's part. But now she grasped strongly for help, and it seemed to him a gain that she should place this much reliance on him. As they toiled upward, a wandering night-hawk sailed high over their heads, his muffled, secret note falling like a question: "Who are these?—are these?" Perhaps the true answer would have been, "A pair of lovers." But as yet Burlen could not be sure that this was the true one.

When they arrived at the narrow, uneven surface at the top, — a solid floor of schist cross-lined, irregularly worn away by the conflicts of time, and pitted with fine dents from billions of driving rain-drops during many centuries, — they discovered Whitcot and Viola, busily looking at various points in the

vast landscape below, and holding on to their hats against the swift breeze that came bounding and sweeping with unexpected velocity over the bare, stony crest.

"Only think of it!" cried the Diana of the tin box. "We can see Boston, Edith! But it's only a little smoky spot on the horizon, down there where you see just a narrow blue strip of sea. Look!"

"We have been talking about the geology of the mountain," Whitcot announced, looking rather learned.

As Burlen looked off to where the faint line of the sea was visible, the grim mountain under their feet seemed to be looking also at the distant ocean which, in ages past, had lapped its base and had now retreated so far. "It's curious to reflect," he said, "that that's really the rim of an immense continent; and I've been told that Monadnoc is one of the oldest mountains in it. I believe it's what they call Laurentian, is n't it?"

Whitcot believed it was, in part. "Just imagine, Edith, wild boars making their dens here in some one of the former cycles of vegetation," he went on; "and you can throw in, if you like, one or two woolly elephants roaming among the palms and cinnamons."

"A woolly elephant? How absurd!" said Viola.

"Did elephants ever make themselves ridiculous by having wool?" asked Edith.

"Yes. But it probably did n't strike them as ridiculous. I've no doubt they took it very seri-

ously. Fashion makes all the difference — even with animals of that calibre.”

They went around to the northern side, overlooking Dublin Lake, which from here dwindles to something like the proportions of a hand-mirror; and they tried to study the marks made by the continental glacier, which at some points on Monadnoc cut gashes two feet deep into the stony wall, before it loosed its cold clutch forever.

“One can hardly imagine that time,” said Burlen, “even after reading about it. And yet some plants grow here even now that belong properly to the high North or to the snowy Alps, — certain varieties of saxifrage, I believe. They are a legacy of the glacial period, and would never have appeared here at all, if it had n’t been for that great procession of ice which passed by, thousands of years ago.”

“So these little flowers still keep the ice in remembrance?” Edith asked. “Isn’t that strange? And there’s something very beautiful in it, too.” She looked far away over the dim world below them, musing, with a look of wondering pleasure. “Oh, I’m so glad we came up here!” she exclaimed, enthusiastically, bringing her gaze back to what was immediately around her.

“Let’s go down again,” the engineer proposed, in a moment more. “It blows too hard up here, and I’m getting frightfully hungry, besides.”

Viola was ready; but Edith declared she had not seen half enough. “I’m going to see if I can find a more sheltered place,” she added, “out of the wind,

where I can sit and look at things a little. But don't wait, Viola : I shall start back very soon."

The two disappeared over the side of the rocky platform as if they had gone down a trap-door. By the time they were out of sight Edith had found an elbow of the ridge which would keep off the wind and still permit a sufficient view into the valley ; so she sat down behind it, and Burlen took a place near her.

"Is that Savage's?" she asked, pointing to the village that lay at such a dizzying depth and so far away.

"It must be," he said, "though it seems as frail and insignificant as a few white egg-shells that have fallen down there and broken."

"There is something awful about these great heights," she said, with a slight shudder. "I feel almost lost in space. Really, Mr. Burlen, it makes me think how to God, looking down on the worlds, we must dwindle down into one small speck. All our souls and hearts together make only a little atom, for Him."

"And what then?" Burlen asked, curious to find out what she was thinking further.

"What then?" she repeated. "Isn't that enough? It makes it very hard to hold on to belief and to all that's best, if one feels that there is nothing supreme and individual about one's self."

"It doesn't seem to me so," he said, simply. "We have the *sense* of being important and being individuals. That is enough. For instance, suppose

I am crushed, beaten down into obscurity in this life; do you think I should lose that sense of individual being? Not at all. Well; if I don't lose it in sinking into insignificance before men, I certainly ought not to before God, because He is more sympathetic and sees farther than they do."

She looked up at the sky and sighed. "Ah, that's because you have a plan in your life. I have thought I had, too; but I'm not so sure now. At any rate, my aim does n't seem good for much, any longer."

"What aim is it?"

"Oh, you would despise it, of course," she said. "I half do, myself. I have had an ambition to lead in society, — in a good way, you know; but still, to take a place where I can lead others. I have n't been willing to be lost in anything. I'm afraid I want other people and things to be lost in me."

"I think you don't quite do your idea justice," he said. "To be a good leader is n't a thing to despise." He spoke with some reserve, however, and stopped short.

"Yes, but I think it would be finer if I put down that arrogant feeling, would n't it?" she made answer. "I ought to learn to lose myself a little."

"That's a virtue, undoubtedly," said the young preacher, feeling that he would much rather adore than give counsel, in this case.

They became silent, and strong feelings rushed through his mind during the pause. Would she be willing to lose herself at all in him? Could he ask

her to do so? And would it be too much like sacrificing her to himself? Then there came a throbbing exultation at the thought of possibly winning her.

The moment they ceased speaking, the silence of the mountain-top began to close in around them like oblivion; though it was accented by the cry of a bird now and then, or the steady low buffeting of the wind around the stony crown. This influence threw Burlen into a species of brief trance, in which a palingenesis of Nature took place. He saw and felt in a few minutes, as if by actual experience of his own, all the marvellous mutations through which this great bulwark of the valleys had passed during lapsed æons.

The ancient sea-mud began to heave and harden and crystallize under the influence of creative heat, and then rose above the universal waters. This was the small beginning of the mountain. Ages passed by in a flash, and the air shook with illimitable thunders as new ranges burst upward, and this one was carried higher. The earth-crust cracked and curled like burning paper; wrinkled valleys drew out their uneasy length between the heights. There was a new inrushing of the sea, swarming with speechless marine life; there were floods of fire. Out of the lifeless and inorganic rose like a mist the first life of plants and reptiles, and was expunged again like a mist. Then came another order of gigantic birds and beasts, with a prodigious tropic vegetation. Thousands of years had passed over the moun-

tain's head, but it kept the productiveness of youth and nurtured a multifarious life, putting forth rich beauties of growth. But another period of death arrived; this time by freezing; and the ice-blocks ground off and carried away from the mountain substance enough to make a little kingdom. What was left of Monadnoc now was only a ruin of its former self.

But it still took its part in the new creation; it germinated new forests; it submitted to the foot of a new species of being — man. The soft white clouds drifted above it; the ancient height smiled in the sunlight. And here, on its impassive summit, a lover mused in the presence of the woman he loved.

This huge creation of extinct forces was a foundation for him. He rose upon it in the strength of a race loftier than all preceding forms of life. The rock was inert and lifeless: *he* breathed. The rock could endure till the dissolution of the earth, and it required nothing outside of itself. The man would not endure so long, but he could share his life with others, and had the privilege, the need, of drawing upon their life and love.

It was a singular mood, and lasted only a few minutes; but a mysterious strength and inspiration seemed to rise up out of the dark bulk beneath him and pass into his veins, as he dreamed. It was a current of longing that flowed up from the very roots of time, he fancied, and filled his heart, — as if this alone were what the mountain had been waiting for. Must he not obey its impulsion?

"Do you remember that day," he asked, "when I met you coming back on the stage, at the Cleft, and we looked off at Monadnoc and talked about it?"

"Oh yes, indeed. Now that I'm here, though, it hardly seems the same mountain any more."

"It's very strange," he rejoined, "to find ourselves in possession, as it seems, of what we saw so far from us a few weeks ago. It strikes me as the same only in one way; that is, it still forms a sort of centre for plans and hopes that were beginning to connect themselves with it then. It looked so unattainable, then; and yet here I am on the crest! I'm wondering whether I ought to hope that I shall reach other unattainable things, the same way."

For an instant she thought he had in mind the question of success in his vocation. "Why not?" she returned, looking brightly at him.

"Ah, you don't understand. It is you I am thinking of."

"I?"

They looked straight into one another's eyes. Edith felt as if the wide air-spaces around them were growing thinner and colder; she put out her hand with a gesture as though she might cling to the young man for protection, and then quickly drew it back. He had risen when he began to speak, and was looking down on her almost with an effect of being in some way a part of the sunny cloud which she beheld stretched out on either side of him in the sky beyond. His face was transfigured by a tender light.

"Have you never seen it?" he asked. "I love you. I love you with all the good that is in me, Miss Archdale. Do you think I could rise to you, by the strength of my love?"

"No, no! I have n't really known it," she answered him, finding that the flickering consciousness of his admiration which she had felt from time to time had never disclosed what this one open, overmastering glance of devout passion revealed. "It is *I*, Mr. Burlen, — I'm afraid I could not be worthy of your love."

"How can that be, Edith? Don't make me feel my own unworthiness still more, by speaking so. Tell me; tell me! Everything seems to depend on what you answer." But she did not answer. She looked slowly away over the valleys and the hills that slept in hazy unreality below. Here on the mountain's crown it seemed easy to stand with Burlen alone, and respond to his avowal with an intensity and trust matching his own. But how would it be down in that every-day world? He saw that her hand trembled, and stealing nearer took it in his own. "Oh, Edith," he said, with the gentleness of awed wonder: "can it be true?"

The amber beads showed by their movement that she was breathing too tremulously to speak. But she bent her head. It was a consent, and at the same time an attitude of reverence for the happiness which was descending upon her. Burlen drew her hand softly to his lips, but when he let it go again he wondered if it were really her hand that he had

kissed, and what had become of all that past so recently existent, wherein this little act would have been impossible.

Suddenly she turned towards him again, and with bright tears in her eyes began to smile. "After all," she said, "I haven't given you any answer in words. But I do — trust you, Robert." She could not utter the more tender word yet. "Oh, but I can't believe you feel so about me. Why, I have so many faults!" She gazed at him with something like dismay.

If there is any one thing more than another that will intoxicate a young man when thoroughly in love, it is to hear his goddess speak of herself as a mere woman exemplifying the defects of her kind.

Burlen became still happier than before. "How ignorant you are about yourself!" he cried, with a new gayety. "That's a fault, I admit; and a very serious one. But I hope I can remedy it. I'll try, I can assure you."

"But I *will* try to be good, Robert. And you will help me. You will teach me everything, won't you? And we will learn together. And if I can be of any use to you, — if you really think I can help you in your career, — oh, how happy I shall be!"

"There is one thing," he said, some time after, as they still lingered there — "one thing I had forgotten. I have not yet told you about myself and my past. Have you thought how little you know about me?"

"In that way — yes. But I think I know a great deal about you that is better worth while."

"What I shall have to tell you will be full of painfulness and wretchedness," he persisted, a shadow of his old grief darkening his face for an instant, as if the sky above them had become a little less radiant.

"What of that?" she answered, full of hope. She thought that, standing with him in this lonely place, she gained a new conception of how heavy the solitude of sorrow must have been that had encompassed him. But she also thought that, with the strength of their union, she could dissipate the last trace of it. "Could I truly love you," she asked, "unless I expected to share your burdens as well as your joys? I love you for yourself, not what you may have been through; but all your trials, past and to come, will be dear to me, if I can help you in them."

"Bravely spoken!" he exclaimed, in his frank, unconventional way. He drew her to him in a proud embrace.

And so on the rough ledge that diadems Monadnoc's head, the flower of love and aspiration bloomed naturally above the wreck of ages, shedding its perfume on two young hearts united.

XXII.

TREACHERY.

AS the lovers moved across the open space on the crest to begin their descent, the head and shoulders of a man rose above the verge of the rocky terrace on which they stood, just at the point towards which they were going. The face that thus confronted them was Ravling's.

Burlen instantly released Edith's arm, which was resting in his. But the pale, stricken visage of the young lawyer showed that he had comprehended the situation at once, and had read in it his own doom. He remained motionless, his figure concealed by the rock, from the shoulders down; so that he had a curious air of being three quarters buried, and looking up out of his grave in envy at the new happiness of his rival.

"We were getting anxious about you," he said, as they came nearer, making a brave attempt at a cheery, commonplace tone. "That is, Mrs. Savland was. She gave out at the foot of the peak here, and asked me to come up and look for you."

I don't think Burlen and Edith had any very definite idea as to what took place after this, except that lunch was eaten under some trees near the hotel, and that they, individually or dually, were in a state of

transport for which enjoyment would have been a tame word. To the young man the whole world seemed altered; the landscape was peculiarly luminous,— he could have walked twenty miles without fatigue. It was strange, too, that he had ever thought life a problematical or difficult thing: it presented no desperate perplexities at all. So far was he carried by this conviction of its amiable harmlessness, that he was about to pick a cluster of red berries resembling mountain-ash, the touch of which alone is poison, when suddenly prevented by Ravling, who— feeling his generosity challenged by his accidental discovery of the new state of affairs — exercised a careful protection over the lovers during the rest of the trip.

On the drive home, they came to a cross-roads where they had to wait a moment for another team that was moving across the track. Ravling noticed it especially, on account of an odd correspondence between the white horse marked off into sections by the black straps of his harness and the man in the wagon who was informally attired in black trousers and a white shirt, so that his back, crossed by a pair of suspenders, presented a large X boldly marked upon the cotton expanse. While he was looking at this, it occurred to him that he had seen the man before.

“Hello! There’s Stubbs,” exclaimed Pride, suddenly drawing in the reins.

The other man turned, and disclosed the pinched features and economical skin of Marshall Stubbs,

the driver of the stage between Willowbridge and Marle.

“What can he be doing here?” questioned Burlen.

This was speedily answered by a brief conversation between the farmer and the driver on the subject of hay. “He comes up here on ‘spec,” Pride added for the enlightenment of the party. “Comes every season — the old skinflint! An’ it pays him, too. He gets our hay for a little somethin’ under nothin’, and then sells at a fair profit down to Boston. We have to do it ‘cause we hain’t got the facilities. But Fernlow, he burned a lot o’ his hay, last year, rather ‘n give in.”

Having delivered this gloomy information, Mr. Pride dropped into a train of rather depressing meditation, and repeated some of his former comments on the increasing brevity of grass. “Got down’s low’s my knee, now,” he muttered. “Bimeby it’ll get down to under that, and then it’ll keep on till I get under *it*.” And he contemplated his long legs with a grieved surprise, that, when his person afforded such fine opportunities for measuring a very tall crop, the grass should avail itself thereof to so slight an extent.

Burlen, remembering the smothered dislike which Stubbs had on several occasions manifested towards him, — for no ostensible reason except that he was an enthusiast for beautiful scenery, — was conscious of an equally strong repugnance for the stage-driver. Pride’s statement regarding him seemed to justify this antipathy. But how curious, that, on the very

day when the young man had attained to that promise of a felicity the highest he could imagine here below, Stubbs should again cross his path, — a sodden incarnation of sordidness creeping up from Marle into the grand demesne of the mountains, for a brief recreation in the form of hard bargaining! So it seemed to Burlen; but he soon forgot the man again with the renewal of that buoyant contentment on which he was just at present being wafted along without effort.

Edith did not run to her aunt, on getting back to the farm, with any confession of her engagement. She could not possibly have laid her head on that lady's fragile and inadequate shoulder, there to impart in broken murmurs — which I believe is the accepted idea of what should be done on these occasions — the wonderful secret of her joy. Mrs. Savland's mind was not large enough to contain so great, so expansive a confidence; and to pour it out upon her would have been only a desecration. But if she did not receive the substance of it, she at least gathered some of the essence. She had a conviction that "something had happened;" and therefore she was not unprepared for the news when Archdale came to her towards evening, and told her that Burlen had asked for Edith's hand and had been accepted.

"Oh, Thomas! And you *approve*?"

"Yes, Grace. I do."

The next remark of his sister seemed irrelevant.

"Where are my medicines?" she asked, vaguely.

"Your what?"

"Medicines!"

"What on earth are you going to do? Prepare a philter to change their affections?" Archdale broke into unseemly laughter, and was half stifled by his efforts to repress it.

"Thomas," said Mrs. Savland, deeply injured, "you are unfeeling, — unchristian! Don't you see how faint this news makes me?"

"Oh," said he, anxiously, "I never thought of that. "Where *are* the medicines?"

"In that little black box there," Grace answered promptly.

He wondered why she had asked, if she knew so well; but he got them for her in silence. Poor Mrs. Savland's bandages and lotions had been useless, that day, and were still more useless in face of the present disaster. But she comforted her spirit and her nerves as well as she could by swallowing a quantity of little pulsatilla sugar-pills. She refrained, however, from coming down to tea, and finished off a large supply of toast in the grief-laden silence of her own room and heart. "And the cruelest pang of all," she declared internally while consuming the last piece, "is that my own brother's daughter should refuse me her confidence." At this point the scented handkerchief came into play, and when her face again emerged from the folds it was if possible serener, more unwrinkled, and more placidly narrow than ever.

But Edith did steal into Viola's room before they went to bed, to tell her what had happened. It was done with such maturity of manner, so restful and

satisfied a calm, that Viola—who prided herself on her “sympathy,” and was ready to be quite shattered by affectionate and tearful responsiveness to her friend’s new, sweet delight—was astonished at the ease of the announcement, and hardly knew what to do. Notwithstanding this, they exchanged so many hugs and kisses that one would have supposed it was *they* who were engaged to each other. After a while Miss Welsted, sitting on the bedside, looked up at Edith, who stood by her, and said falteringly, —

“I’m so glad, if *you* are glad, Edith. And I—I thought, all the time, it was going to be Mr. Ravling.”

“No, dear,” said Edith with peculiar sweetness, “I think he is going to marry some one else.”

This remark may appear superfluous, since it was obvious that the lawyer could not marry Edith under existing circumstances. But Viola understood what it meant. She gazed at her companion with gratitude and a personal satisfaction of her own glistening in her eyes, and made an answer which to both of them seemed perfectly adequate. “You’re a sweet, lovely creature, Edith,” was what she said.

And Edith retired, with a double cause for pleasure. She rejoiced in the virtuous consciousness of having given up Ravling to her friend; and this consciousness was enhanced by the comfortable knowledge that she did not want Ravling herself.

“I hope,” said Archdale, in the conference which he, for his share, held with the other party to the betrothal, “that you are not going to be in any

haste about talking over your past worries with Edith." The truth was, much as the mild-hearted professor had sought to reconcile himself to all the conditions of this match, the blemish upon Burlen's antecedents was still very distasteful to him. He wanted to have it obliterated; and the nearest practicable approach to this was for all concerned to ignore it. "I regard the whole thing as settled, now," he concluded. "Why not put it altogether behind you, and consider your life as really beginning now? The actual beginning was a shadow-play, a failure; abortive. You have outlived it. The alarm about your sister's presence here is done away with. You have framed new and more fit conditions for your career. Is n't it strictly logical to put everything inharmonious out of sight?"

"I'm not sure that I can ever do that," returned the young man, yieldingly. "But it may be better not to talk of those things again, even though Edith must of course know them all, in time."

Archdale winced at this thought. "At all events," he urged, "let us put it off. She trusts you, and has good reason to. Let things settle, for a while. If I advise you to wait, certainly she will not blame you for doing so." He waited some moments for an answer, and then demanded wistfully: "Are we in accord, Robert? Do you promise me to be silent, for the present?"

Life had grown so bright; the future seemed so simple; this advice was so insinuating and soothing, —Burlen rapidly came to think that he might as well

agree. "Yes," he at length said, "if you wish me, I will promise — for the present."

His original intention had been to have a long and important talk with Edith the very next morning, which should make her the sharer of his past as well as of his present and future. But this interposition on her father's part, immaterial as it seemed at the moment, changed the course of events decidedly.

When the two defeated rivals withdrew to their tent that night, the lawyer subsided dejectedly upon his couch of hemlock-boughs, and with a vehemence he seldom gave way to exclaimed: "I'm sick of this, Whitcot! I've stayed here too long."

"Why, what has come over you?" demanded the other, comfortably lighting a brier-pipe which he had just filled, and taking his place on a camp-stool in the tent-door. The moonlight was streaming in over him, and gave him a luminous greenish, ghostly look, sharply in contrast with the ruby spot of fire in the pipe-bowl below his lips. "I thought you were very well pleased."

"I'm not sure," responded Ravling, slowly, "that the mountain air agrees with me. Boh! Don't you notice the chill to-night? It's fairly autumnal." He added, with a sarcasm reserved for his own private appreciation: "I found it surprisingly cold up on top of the mountain to-day. The life seemed to go out of me, when I got up there."

"Well, if you're going to leave, I suppose I shall have to, as well," said the engineer.

"Not necessarily," Ravling replied, from the dark couch where he was now half reclining. "You can keep the tent if you like, and I'll halve the expense just the same. Still, you may conclude not to stay, either. Especially," he continued, after an instant's delay, "if I tell you something which I believe has occurred to-day. I judge that you are seriously interested in Miss Archdale."

The smoker's eyes suddenly glittered in the moonlight, and were fastened upon him.

"I'm not the only one, I believe, who is interested in her," was his reply.

"That may be, and there's a point of agreement between us,—possibly in more than one sense. But what I was going to say was—" Ravling changed his approach all at once. "The discovery is my own, but I should n't think of mentioning it generally, outside. You, I consider, ought to know, since we are camp-fellows and—friends. Otherwise I should hold my peace until the two most concerned—"

"The two?" interrupted Whitcot. "For Heaven's sake, man, don't be so long with your story! Remember, you're not conducting a trial, and need n't work up to the point gradually, to influence the jury." How little the irritable young fellow suspected that, before long, Ravling *would* be conducting a trial, in which he (Whitcot) was to hold a very important but a very silent and singularly undesirable part! "The two?" he repeated. "Somebody besides Edith, then! Who?"

"I see you have guessed," said Ravling, coolly. "Robert Burlen, of course. I can state almost as a proved fact that they became engaged to-day."

"Engaged!" a few white ashes dropped from Whitcot's pipe, through the spectral illumination that hung round him. He bounded to his feet. "What makes you think so?"

Probably Ravling, who was no more than human, found some mitigation of his own disappointment in seeing Whitcot hit, too. "Suppose we go out and walk," he said, "and I'll tell you."

They donned their great-coats, stepped out into the field, and began walking up and down, side by side,—two muffled and lugubrious shapes in the moon's pale glare. The lawyer set forth what he had in his mind.

"Well, I'm satisfied," said Whitcot at length, recovering himself.

"How so? It's too late, Whitcot, for you to place any other stake. *Le jeu est fait*, as they say in Homburg."

"No. There's one play remaining for me, by which I may win."

"I can't see that," Ravling rejoined, in a tone of displeasure. "One hardly wants to try winning, when two people have settled their affairs so far."

"The engagement has not been announced," observed the engineer.

"You make fine distinctions," the other said dryly. "Too fine for a blunt taste like mine."

"I imagine Miss Archdale will make distinctions,

too," was the confident retort, "when she learns what I know of Burlen's origin."

"His origin? Is it discreditable?"

Then — still pacing up and down, two muffled figures, black in the moon-glare, and now assuming an ominous look — Whitcot went over the story with which we are already familiar. He poured out the animus of his interest in the graduate's secret, without reserve. He broke away from the various subterfuges with which he had at first deceived himself, and did not even attempt to deceive his listener. He violated his pledge of silence given to Burlen, for the miserable satisfaction of defaming him in their common rival's ear.

"And you propose to make all this known to Miss Archdale, without Burlen's knowledge?" Ravling inquired, with studious neutrality.

"Certainly. She ought to know it."

"If you expect my sympathy in such a performance," Ravling went on, "I may as well tell you that you reckon without your host. I advise you to abstain from interference."

"I did n't ask for your sympathy," Whitcot reminded him, self-sufficiently. "It strikes me that you'll need it all for yourself. And, if you don't object, I think I'll go to bed now."

The next day, as Ravling was making a circuit of some fields above the barn, he passed along by a stone-wall fringed with young ash-trees, at the brow of the hill, where he could overlook a secluded swale beyond. Unexpectedly he caught sight of two fig-

ures, whose movements made him pause. The spot abounded in golden-rod, just beginning to uncurl its golden plumes from the green stalk; and Edith had apparently come thither to gather them, for she held a bunch in her hand. But Whitcot was with her, and had begun to talk upon some subject which had caused her to forget the wild flowers.

Ravling could hear some of their tones, but was not near enough to distinguish their words.

The varying action of the two figures, however, told him enough.

The lawyer at once divined, from the previous night's conversation, the topic that engaged them. When his eye first lighted on them, Edith was facing her tormentor — that was the description which seemed to the observer most fitting — with a glance of imperious reprimand.

But Whitcot, it seemed, replied coolly, half apologetically, and yet with such calculated skill that the impassioned woman before him cast her eyes down and turned slightly away, in confusion. Ravling could easily guess that the engineer had thrown some slur upon Burlen, and, on her resenting it, had asked with feigned surprise what could be the cause of her warm feeling.

For a moment nothing passed between them; but presently Whitcot began to speak again. She listened quietly for a few seconds, and then quickly interrupted him.

The engineer resumed, with more heat.

Edith then appeared to direct a short, swift ques-

tion at him; to which he replied in a louder voice, with an air of triumph, at the same time flinging out his arm to point with great emphasis in the direction of the village. "His sister is *there!*" Ravling believed he could almost hear. At least, he was confident that was what had been uttered.

At this Edith raised her hand to her head in a wild way, as if confused or horror-stricken. She threw away the golden-rod she had gathered, and moved rapidly in the direction of the farm-house. Whitcot pursued her with a changed demeanor; seemed to beg her to stop; caught her hand. She snatched it away from him, and turned with a majestic ire that was appalling even to the witness of it at this distance. The young man in gray fell back, and stood frozen before it. Then Miss Archdale went on alone.

"The villain!" murmured Ravling, in helpless wrath, turning away unperceived and feeling partially tainted with guilt at having even looked on at so cowardly an attack, without venturing to interfere. Yet what right had he to interfere? The answer he made himself was immediate, that he had none.

This evening it was Edith who stayed away from the tea-table, while Mrs. Savland resumed her place there. An unprecedented gloom settled down on the little group. Burlen was distraught, being suddenly deprived of all that made the present interesting; and Ravling was so absorbed by his indignation with Whitcot that he could pay little attention to anything else. Luckily, the Rev. Franklin Bland burst

in upon them with his violin, soon after tea, and saved them from funereal silence.

But when the time came for Ravling and Whitcot to seek their tent, the lawyer asked his mate the meaning of the dumb-show which he had witnessed. "Have you been telling her what you told me last night?" he demanded.

"Of course. What else did you expect?" the engineer replied.

"I expected something much better of you," said Ravling. "After this, I shall have to recede from what I said about leaving you the tent. I must ask you to look out for other quarters to-morrow. It's impossible that I should share responsibilities of any kind with you, hereafter, since you've chosen to adopt this line of conduct."

"Oh, very well," returned Whitcot. "It's all the same to me. I'll say good-by to you to-morrow morning." But he was nevertheless aware, too late, that in trying to prejudice Burlen's cause with Edith he had hopelessly ruined his own.

XXIII.

MORTIS FORMIDINE ET IRÂ.

EDITH continuing indisposed the next day, Burlen sought Mrs. Savland's aid to conjure her into visibility, but without effect. Then he tried Miss Viola, who entered into the situation with no lack of sympathy; but her intervention was likewise of no avail. As a last resort, he had recourse to Archdale.

The professor, though much concerned at the inexplicable situation, and very considerate in his procedure with his daughter, was unable to find out what was the matter. The utmost he could obtain was a half-hysterical assent from Edith to the project of seeing Burlen alone.

Their meeting was to take place in the natural arbor of wild-cherry trees, not far from the house. The candidate was there betimes, and awaited her coming.

"What is it, Edith; what is this trouble that has come between us so soon?" he demanded in agonized entreaty, as soon as she entered among the trees. "Something seems to have separated us, and I do not know what."

"You ought to know," she replied. "Oh, why did n't *you* tell me?"

"I? Tell you what?"

"It is more terrible than I can bear!" she cried. "And I trusted you so completely! It would all have been different if it had been you who had spoken."

"Edith," said her lover, with a sudden fear, "what is it you are thinking of? My —"

"Oh, your sister! your sister! your past! All that you have been through. Oh, Robert! to think that you so nearly deceived me!"

Burten was aghast. "Can you believe that?" he asked, amazed. "What! has n't your father told you?"

"No; I would n't let him. I couldn't bear to talk with him. He only persuaded me to see you here. I don't know what to make of it."

"Oh, well, if you haven't even listened, I'm not so much astonished," he answered, though still trembling with the shock that had come upon him. "But if your father has n't told you of all this, who has?"

"Mr. Whitcot," she faltered breathlessly.

"Great powers above! Whitcot? I had almost forgotten him," gasped her lover. "Can it be that he was so venomous?"

"Did n't he tell the truth? How could he dare tell anything else?" she asked, in return. "Answer me, Robert."

"I can't answer you until I know what he said," Burten replied.

In a few scattered phrases she gave him the substance of the engineer's treacherous recital.

"Yes," said Burlen, "the most of it is true; but there is no certainty that that girl he has told you of is my sister."

"But why should you have left it for some one else to tell me all this?" Edith asked, upbraidingly. "Why did n't you tell me yourself?"

"I was going to, Edith."

"Going to? You should have done it! It is too late now."

"But your father knew all about it," the young man protested.

"My father? Impossible! He would have told me if he had known."

"But," said Burlen, thinking that this would at last make things clear, "he did n't want you to know, yet. He wanted to put it all away out of sight. He even made me promise that I would n't talk of it with you, for a time."

"But you promised *me*, one day! You promised you would tell all about yourself. Don't you remember?"

"No, indeed! I never promised. I remember you asked me, and I meant to. I wanted to, even before I should tell you what I felt towards you. But I never promised, Edith."

With a woman's vagueness of interpretation, she had convinced herself that her own former request was the same thing as a consent on his part, and she would n't listen to his explanations. "Oh, Robert! Robert!" she exclaimed, "how terrible this is! Why *did* you do this? What could be gained by it? All must be over, now, between us!"

And, saying this, she darted away from him, leaving him in a condition bordering on frenzy. He struck out from the cherries in a different direction, came to the road, walked a few paces along it, and met Ravling.

"Well," said the lawyer, "Whitcot is going to leave us."

"When? I was just coming to look for him."

"I believe he takes the train to-morrow morning," said Ravling; "but he's going down to the village to-day, — very soon, now. He's going to stay at the hotel over night."

"Very singular!" ejaculated Burlen. "Where is he now?" There was a stern, concentrated eagerness in his manner that might have disturbed the engineer, had he witnessed it.

"He's in the house at this moment, I think," the lawyer said, "bidding good-by to the ladies. He's going to walk to Savage's, he said."

Without waiting, Burlen passed down the road, took a short-cut through a wedge-shaped piece of woods, and came to a stand on the other side of it, close to the highway, intending to intercept his false friend at that point.

It was very sultry in the woods as he went through them, and every time that Burlen stopped, — as he now and then did, to see if any one was coming, — he heard his own heart beating loudly.

He was watching for Whitcot like a hunter awaiting his prey. There was something terrifying to him in his own mood. His wrath against the man who

had so unjustly produced a misunderstanding between Edith and himself was tempestuous; it kept bursting upon him in one wave after another. He tried to resist it, but he could not force himself to turn back.

How could he let so contemptible a creature go without some scathing reprimand, some brief but absolute condemnation? To confront him with his own iniquities, to grind him down with the sense of shame that was his due, and then to leave him, — this, Burlen felt, would barely satisfy the demand of justice; and this he must have.

Before long he saw the figure he awaited moving down the road, passing tree after tree on the other side of the narrow, wedge-shaped wood, and approaching around the bend that would soon bring him to this point. Whitcot trod buoyantly, and whistled as if nothing weighed upon his conscience. Within two minutes he came full upon Burlen, and stopped short in surprise. Almost immediately he put himself in motion again; but he did not resume his soft whistling.

"You're just in time to bid me good-by," he said, affecting indifference.

"Yes. I came here for the purpose of meeting you," Burlen returned, with ill-concealed rage.

Whitcot forced a laugh. "Don't prolong the agony of our parting too far," he admonished the other.

"I'll walk with you a little way," Burlen observed; thinking that he would go down to the

Contoocook, or to his favorite bathing-place under the ash-tree, in the woods, after he had finished the business of moral chastisement.

"How good of you!" the engineer exclaimed, with latent sarcasm. He took out his brier-pipe and began smoking as they started off.

But the candidate gave him short respite, and plunged into the midst of his reproaches. Their voices grew louder and louder in altercation, until finally the two came to a stop beside a wall of thick hemlocks that screened the road, and stood there hotly flinging charge and retort to and fro.

A long, deep roll of thunder boomed from the neighborhood of Monadnoc, and some crows among the trees close by them started up into the air with harsh and awful cries that rang through the dead, simmering stillness of the afternoon like the shrieks of some creature smitten with a mortal wound. But the angry men did not observe these interruptions. Neither did they notice Marshall Stubbs, who, having come out to view some uncut hay on a piece of land in that vicinity, had been drawn on by the noise of the dispute that was proceeding in the road, at the other side of the hemlocks from him. Moving stealthily up to the barrier of green-fringed boughs, he thrust his hard countenance astutely forward as far as prudence would allow, and listened. His tightly stretched lips were pursed up in a curt smile of evil satisfaction as soon as he recognized Bur-len, whose passionate bearing at that moment was greatly to his disadvantage. Stubbs trusted that

there would be a set-to with fists, and began laying bets with himself on the result; odds greatly in favor of Whitcot.

"And why," rejoined that personage, to some renewed charge of Burlen's, — "why should n't I give her a warning, if I thought you were n't the sort of person you assumed to be?"

"*You* a judge in such matters!" cried Burlen, derisively. "That's an audacious notion. It's my opinion that if *you* were known for what you really are, you would be banished from society. I, for one, wish you might be obliterated, — swept out of this life for good and all!"

"Suppose you try obliterating me," Whitcot bitingly returned, "with your blacksmith's arm! That's about what you're fitted for."

Both the wranglers were beside themselves, and Stubbs made sure that at this climax Burlen must square off and begin the physical combat which he expected. The young theologian, it is true, did clench his fists as if to strike; but instead of carrying out that movement he bit his lips, and by a prodigious strain held himself back. Then he veered swiftly about and began to move up the road whence he had come; forgetting, in the blind struggle with his half-insane passion, his purpose of going to bathe.

The engineer, however, launched one more shaft at him. "Aha!" he breathed in a low, penetrating tone, but as if he were registering a discovery in respect of some lower order of animal: "A coward, too!"

Having said this, he also turned to go upon his way; but, instead of following the road, he obeyed an impulse to make a short-cut through the woods.

As that final taunt reached Burlen, he flung his arms up in uncontrollable excitement. Seemingly, he had been goaded beyond his endurance. Remembering at the same instant that he had intended to go to the river, and that he was unfit to appear among his friends while overwrought with this fury, he reversed his steps, came back, and — though his antagonist had disappeared among the trees — strode down the road, in the same general direction that the engineer had taken.

“That means big mischief!” said Stubbs, aloud, relieved from precaution by their departure. “I’d give half a dime to see the end of it.” His accustomed penuriousness did not forsake him, even at this crisis.

The day was lengthening, and the air grew darker still from the storm-clouds that were drifting over Monadnoc. Whitcot walked faster. There was something exceedingly distasteful in the situation: the quarrel with Burlen, added to a sense of the fatal misstep he himself had made, must have thrown his nerves off their balance.

He looked around several times, to see if Robert was following him. Was there not a sound of footsteps, as on that well-remembered first evening, behind him or off there at the side, behind the underbrush? Stand still, Whitcot! Listen!

No; nothing but the foolish antics of the wind. It has come suddenly, and is blundering through the wood, rattling a few dry boughs, and picking up the dead leaves in loose handfuls to throw them after the lonely walker in a feeble kind of mimic wrath. But see how it stirs the branches above him, causing them to nudge one another with uncouth mystery! One long, cloaked arm seems to take hold of another long, cloaked arm, and all beckon and point together as if moved by the presence, in the secret places here, of some dreadful, shadowy thing not to be named. Whitcot! Whitcot! Don't you see that it is time to get back to the road?

The wind comes with another rush, and sweeps the leaves up higher than before. Now it appears to be playing with some sardonic purpose of overwhelming and covering up and burying away the lusty youth who steps forward so boldly against it. Dead men have been wrapped before now, Whitcot, in this same winding-sheet of dead leaves, the dust of vanished summers. Step you never so boldly, you must step into your shroud at last. You know not where or when that will be. Here are the winds and the leaves all ready to cover you now, and the fading gleams of evening shall light you to your final rest, if you choose to take it here!

In the morbid twilight thickening through the woods, shadows and changing shapes assemble as if to enact some gloomy rite. Yet has not our traveller often passed such spots as this, and with the same curdling forebodings that vex him at this moment?

But the obstacles always yielded, the fear passed away; he came out warm and safe, and the forebodings proved meaningless. Why, then, dread anything to-day?

But it is baffling, nevertheless, to have the wind keep up this rough game of pelting him with leaves; whirling them around his head, driving them into his very face; waiting for him and leaping upon him suddenly, or clutching at him from behind. According to its fancy it lifts the lifeless leaves into coils or spirals, and gives them — in the increasing sylvan dusk — a rude, fragmentary resemblance to divers animals that rise up fiercely for a moment or two and battle with each other or chase the young man's form, then fade away into nothing or sweep off in full cry before the blast and come rounding back in a savage troop. Have you never seen such shapes loosely suggested by blowing leaf-heaps? Creatures of mouth and claw they seem, — dogs, wolves, tigers, — or others that rear themselves higher and strive to take the shape of man. Strange horror! To one under the influence of such fancied likenesses, the most terror-striking of all these staggering, wavering bodies are those that make one think of human beings.

Ah, great Heaven! What is this that comes at last with fell purpose through the whirling drift? It is a man!

There is horror in the wood. Were those the clear gray eyes filled with stilly fire, that for an instant faced the victim before the struggle? Or were

they the same that had lately gleamed upon him in a fury of reproach? . . . What is it that tightens round his neck? Are the waters of the black river down in the valley rising, rising, and choking him? . . . What is happening? Why does it all seem so strange and far off, as if it were being done to some one else?

Is it an actual deed, or something that some one has been telling about? . . . What pity there will be for the poor senseless body, when it is all over! . . . There was, in fact, a murder committed somewhere in the neighborhood here, long ago, it is said.

Look! One reeling glimpse of an opening through the trees, and Monadnoc stamped dimly on the sky that fast recedes,—the last glimpse of earth to a man who is sinking into the deep, incurable blindness of death! That is just as Whitcot had fancied it must have been with the man he had heard of, in that same murder which was done hereabout, in one of these darksome hollows.

But if it is nothing more than fancy now, why does that figure in the gray coat—so like the solitary walker whose feet lately rustled through the silence—lie there with its face in the leaves, motionless as a dead limb fallen from one of the trees?

XXIV.

DISCOVERY OF A MURDER.

IT is Epenetus B. Savage — the man with a face like a disturbed shadow — who comes skimming along in his restless, speculative buggy, before all the folks at Pride's are quite dressed, the next morning. And it is Epenetus B.'s dog that runs beside the buggy, with a red tongue hanging out of his black jaws, but suddenly pauses, sniffs, utters a weak howl, and darts into the woods beside the road.

The preoccupied man in the light vehicle is borne along without noticing this abrupt canine excursion; but his horse has not trotted many yards before a piteous, barking cry, — a strange, inarticulate call for human aid, though proceeding from no human throat, — floats out from among the trees, and causes the business-minded Savage to draw rein at once.

A glance back; the cry repeated; rapid movements on the part of Epenetus; a scraping of the wheel against the side of the buggy in making a short turn. Then the light structure shoots back over the course it has just traversed. The dog tears his way through the bushes, out to the road; stands waiting; sees that help is coming, and then disappears again madly. No delay, now, on the part of Epenetus. The horse is tethered to an iron weight, which his

master throws out like an anchor to keep him from drifting ; and the driver himself plunges through the underbrush, after the dog.

In a few minutes he comes out again, wet with dew, and showing a face more like a disturbed shadow than it ever was before or is likely to be again, hoists the anchor-weight, and whips up furiously for Pride's. His shaggy attendant, entirely forgotten, though the immediate cause of this excitement, rushes along also in the dust of the flying wheels. Epenetus B. Savage and Epenetus B. Dog will be mentioned in the newspapers as having been the first to make an appalling discovery.

They arrive at the farm, breathless, — the man trembling, and the buggy under him quivering, too. How redly the sunbeams, through this morning haze, strike upon the dog, splashing him all over with terrifying stains as of blood !

Pride is called for, taken out to the gate, is whispered with, and starts back as if he had been struck ; then casts a terrified look towards the house, as if he would summon the other occupants. This movement is checked by hurried remonstrance from Epenetus, it would be hard to say why. He is bewildered ; wants to gain time : it seems to him as if it ought not to be spoken of just yet. But Timothy comes forth unbidden, and is told. No one can keep this awful secret. If you approach those who know it, you feel a chill, — a vague warning radiated from them. It is in the air. One of these three at the gate must go up to the house ; but if any one goes it will become

known, — this secret which no one can keep except the dead man and that other, worse than dead, who knows how the crime befell. It will become known? Well, what then? We three here at the gate cannot long keep it to ourselves, or we shall go mad; perhaps — who knows? — fall upon each other and wreak some fresh crime, since humanity is capable of such things. The only safety, the only wisdom, is to spread the news, to scatter the horrible deed to all the winds, so that it may not creep, slowly corrupting us, through our frozen veins.

So from that knot of three at the gate, with the restive, red-splashed dog running continually about them, the story spreads to the others in the house.

“Murdered!”

That word went up from Burlen with a terror in the sound different from any other voice among them.

“No, no! It cannot be! Whitcot murdered, and it was I who — oh, this is too frightful!”

No one gave special heed to his exclamation just then. All was confusion for a few moments, and then measures were taken for lodging information at the village, for sending word to Whitcot’s father, and organizing a search for the murderer. Not until Savage had driven away again, and Timothy had gone with his father to call the nearest neighbors, did Burlen’s whereabouts occur as a question of importance. Ravling was consulting with Archdale, hoping to hit upon some fragment of evidence. “Who saw Whitcot last?” he inquired, suddenly.

“I don’t know. Let me see,” said the professor

slowly. "He came into the house to say good-by, and then — why, Robert must have seen him after that. In fact, he told me so. He was very much depressed last night, and finally told me that he had had a bitter altercation with Whitcot, which grieved him."

"Altercation!" The lawyer looked at Archdale, with a new apprehension in his eyes. Archdale caught the alarm, and for an instant they regarded each other in silence.

"But I can't think that has any significance," said the Doctor, at length.

"Perhaps not," Ravling assented hastily, as if fearing to dwell on the point. "But probably Burlen could throw light on Whitcot's last movements. And then it is important, — we must think of the circumstances, you know, — it's important for him to explain his own position at once. Did you notice what he said just now, when Savage told us? '*Whitcot murdered, and I — it was I —*' I don't know exactly, but it was something like that."

Archdale was aghast. Then he rose, with one hand on the table, and demanded sternly: "What do you mean to insinuate, Mr. Ravling? That it is possible —"

"Possible that suspicion may fall on him," answered the lawyer, gravely, with an unflinching gaze. "It is simply prudence and friendship to recognize that. Where is Burlen? Let us see him at once."

They turned their attention immediately to finding their friend; but Burlen had disappeared, and no one knew where he had gone to.

"This is very serious," Ravling observed, as they came back and entered the dining-room for a quiet consultation. "He may have gone to the village. I hope so. It may make him a great deal of trouble to be out of the way just now. Mind you, I say nothing more: it would hardly be possible for me to believe more. But I am anxious for him. Would you object to telling me what you know of his quarrel with Whitcot?"

"I can tell you precisely the cause of it, but nothing further. He would not talk of it last night; he was so much pained at having given way to anger, though it was fully justified. That seemed to be his main concern." And then Doctor Archdale went on to tell of Whitcot's treacherous disclosure to Edith, and the misunderstanding that had ensued between Edith and Burlen.

"Ah, that's what I supposed," said the lawyer. "I knew enough of it to make me suspect just that."

"But Edith already repents of her haste in reproaching the poor fellow," continued the other. "Whitcot, I'm sorry to say, led her to believe that Robert knew his unfortunate sister to be in the village, and was deliberately resolved to ignore her existence. That was what shocked her most; and in the general excitement of the shock she was inclined to upbraid him altogether for having kept back so much of his personal history. But she saw her error last night. There was no opportunity of an explanation with Robert: you recall how despondent

and abstracted he was, and how soon he went to his room. Edith came to me and explained everything before we retired, and I was to prepare Robert for their reconciliation this morning. And now everything is thrown out. — But he *must* be about the house somewhere. Suppose we look again." For a moment Ravling lost his studied calm. "Poor Miss Archdale!" he murmured, his head drooping upon his upraised arm. "If there were anything I could do! I hope no greater evil is in store."

"Come," said Archdale, "we must look again for Robert."

As they rose, the door opened, and Edith stood on the threshold, very pale, but strenuously commanding herself. "Is — is there anything more?" she asked. "Have they found him?"

"Whom?" asked her father.

"The" — she shuddered, and stopped. "Have they found out whether it was accident, or — oh, tell me something! How is it, Mr. Ravling?"

The lawyer had grown pale, too. "There is nothing more to tell," he answered. "Leave it to us, Miss Archdale, I beg you."

But her father was less prudent. "Have you seen Robert?" he asked.

"No," said she. Then, with a pang of nervous fright trembling through her features: "Why? Why?" she demanded. "Have you been looking for him?"

"We wanted to consult him," Ravling said, shooting towards the older man a glance of reprimand and warning that struck him like an arrow.

"Yes, dear; to consult him," Archdale faltered. "Go to your aunt, Edith. We are busy, and you ladies must keep together."

The second search was as fruitless as the first; but breakfast was announced, and the two gentlemen hoped that this would bring Burlen. The ladies took the meal upstairs: Ravling and Archdale sat down alone. They tasted their coffee and tried to eat something, but could no longer speak. At last, a loud knock at the door roused them again. Archdale's first thought was that Burlen had come, but he saw, in another moment, that this could not be: the candidate would have entered without such preliminary. In fact, the knock preceded the entrance of Sheriff Brown. Burlen had not been seen in the village, but on the arrival of the news brought by Epenetus B. Savage and his dog, Marshall Stubbs had made known the circumstance of the quarrel witnessed by him, and had made a complaint under oath before a justice of the peace. As a result of this, Major Brown had been armed with a warrant for the arrest of Burlen, and had come now to search Pride's house.

The object of this visit was concealed from the ladies by the Major's orotund statement that the candidate for the ministry was wanted as a witness to assist in giving evidence, and that they were obliged to go through the form of looking for him because he did not happen to be at hand. But even the power of the Sheriff was unavailing. Burlen remained mysteriously out of sight. Major Brown

and his *posse* retreated ; Archdale and Ravling went down to the village, and returned. The day wore on ; evening approached. Still the young clerical candidate did not make his appearance.


Then there began to steal over Edith a mist of vague but awful apprehension, in which she could as yet make out nothing decisive. Where was Robert ? Could it be possible that he had finally gone to the village and was detained there by his efforts to assist justice ; or had something dreadful happened to him also ? It must be dangerous to be wandering about the country now, since Whitcot could meet with such a fate so near Savage's. And then gradually that other danger began to assert itself, of which the rest were secretly thinking, — the danger that a long, unexplained absence just at this time would bring, since it was known that he had had serious cause for disagreement with Whitcot the day before. It was only at moments that this occurred to her, and even then it was no more than the shadow of a threatening possibility ; but when at last the inmates of the farm-house parted for the night, and she found herself alone with the suspense as to Burlen still unbroken, a dread more deadly than any hitherto — commencing in one small spot in her mind — extended its sway like sand blown by the wind, until her whole soul grew parched and weary with it. Since she had given the young preacher her promise on the mountain-height, her hours of happy repose, exquisite though they were, had been few. Whitcot's attack had subjected her faith in Robert to an

early and exacting strain, under which she had given way, though only for a short time. But now it was forced to undergo an ordeal a thousand times more difficult than that. In this new trial of her faith and fortitude there was a clutch like that of a preordained destiny. Were they doomed to be put asunder by forces beyond her control? Perhaps she had been right, that day in church, when she had thought of him as standing in a natural isolation, far off from her. And was she not bearing this trial now all alone, away from him, without his aid? But he, too, was alone; he had left her when she had spoken words of reproach and anger: how could she tell that he was not suffering even more than she? With this, her mind reverted to his past years, during which he had gone through so much in solitude; and she resolved that she would be strong, as he had been. But her anxiety was too great to bear without aid: she turned to God. "Oh, is there no help in your glorious sky?" she murmured, sitting like a ghost in her dusky room. "Is there no answer out there in the breezy night?"

She gazed out into the moonlight, but found no consolation. The maple that rose thick-foliaged beside her window, jutting masses of grim, greenish-white leaves out of the deep shadow at its black core, waved them with heavy hands in the slow wind; and even as these swaying hands tossed up and down, they changed into the aspect of strange, dead faces that mocked her.

Meanwhile, the two gentlemen of the household had been weighted with a fresh fact of bad omen, imparted by Mrs. Pride; which was, that, on his return to the farm the preceding afternoon, Burlen entered by the back way and passed through the kitchen, with his clothes dripping. This he explained by saying that he had been walking carelessly, and had slipped into the river. An accident like that would have no special significance ordinarily; but it seemed to place Burlen near the spot where Whitcot had been found, and there would be those who would imagine reasons for his inventing such a story to account for his being drenched with water. Thinking of these things, Archdale hardly slept; and Ravling found himself incapable of taking any rest in the tent which he had so lately shared with the murdered man. He tried to read; he walked up and down the road, and stared towards the village as if its one lingering light could disclose to him what was going on there. He sat still and listened for the tramp of hoofs, some new arrival bringing information. But the incessant, sad cry of the crickets alone responded to his listening.

There were others who kept vigil that night; and some of the watchers at Savage's at last descried the light of a small fire on some high ground in the direction of Monadnoc. It might be an innocent fire, but there was a chance that guilty hands had kindled it for comfort in the chill night, until flight should be resumed. Little time was lost in



sending a determined band towards the twinkling spot.

At that moment a man sat beside the fire, which had been built in a small open space on the natural hearth of a smooth rocky slab. The flames sprang nimbly up between the sticks and made an agreeable but wild and lonely glow amid the silent surroundings. It burnished the thick fringe of ferns below the rock into vivid visibility, struck here and there upon branches of underbrush that stuck up from the ground at accidental angles, suggesting eager figures just risen up to look ; and farther off it darted lines of light across the boles of larger trees. These spots of reflected fire all around on rock, tree, and fern became like so many flaming eyes concentrated upon the low blaze of the figure bending over it. Surrounded by them, and with the crackling fagots casting up their illumination into his face, there was no possibility on the man's part of escaping identification, should his pursuers come this way.

The face thus revealed, though sad and haggard, was that of Robert Burlen.

On hearing the tragic tidings brought that morning, he had been struck with an overpowering remorse, and had felt the necessity of getting out of sight. Taking his hat, he had gone silently out and made his way into the nearest woods, wandering on without noticing in what direction chance bore him. How swiftly his unhallowed wish for Whitcot's extinction, uttered in the insanity of his first resentment, had been fulfilled ! That was what he was

thinking: and he presented it to himself in many ways, torturing himself with a sense of wickedness that seemed now by this sudden and violent death to have had the stamp of permanence set upon it.

The fresh, peaceful quiet of the woods began at length to relieve him; when suddenly an ugly apprehension that he might come unawares upon the murdered man beset him. He shrank from the thought like one guilty, and looked about him to see where he was, so that he might retrace his steps. He had been walking blindly for a good while, getting always deeper into the growth, and forcing aside the hindering thickets wherever there was no passage around them; so that he had no conception of his present locality. Several narrow avenues opened among the trees, and he made an attempt to go back along the one he had just arrived by; but everything was unfamiliar, — new windings radiated everywhere. The idea that he could be lost seemed preposterous; but after he had wandered for hours seeking in vain for some escape, he could no longer deceive himself.

At first, the excitement of trying to find his way nerved him and diverted his mind; but when the attempt began to appear hopeless, the gloom of his regrets came back and bore him down. He grew faint for want of food, and succeeded only after much effort in finding a few late berries. He sank down and waited, in exhaustion. Then by degrees some clusters of club-moss pricking up through the dark earth at his side interested him. He studied their structure, and fell to wondering at their perfection.

From these he passed to the leaves nearest him ; the marvel and beauty of their delicate shaping and veining grew upon him. He watched closely the smallest insects that travelled through the dead rubbish of the wood within a few feet around his resting-place. Crawling on his knees and observing their adventures among the sticks, straws, weeds, and débris, he came to feel that the petty area he was examining was almost a world complete in itself. All at once he sprang to his feet with a cry. His thoughts, for a time absorbed in these tiny insect-mazes, had abruptly reverted to the crime made known that morning.

The interval of idle companionship with small natural things, however, had put fresh vigor into him. To be lost in this region was no trifling peril, and the risk would increase with every additional hour of fasting and fatigue. He pushed on once more, and this time succeeded in getting upon constantly rising ground ; which was so far an advantage. But the vaulted wood kept growing darker. He attributed this to storm-clouds : the air, however, became cooler and the dusk more pervasive, until he caught sight of a star beyond the boughs, sparkling prematurely, and knew that evening had arrived.

Fearing to advance further, he sat down, heaped dry leaves about him for warmth, and waited. He was just on the edge of a clearing, and in the gap between some dark-tree shafts he beheld the great angular back of Monadnoc hunched up like wizard-work against the clear, dark sky ; also the Scorpion

crawling with its golden or diamonded star-points through the space above. He watched the constellation slowly shifting, hour by hour. Its gradual movement, connected with the imaginary reptile outline, seemed to be a step in the working of some fatalistic enigma ; and then again its aspect changed : it became like a glorious and triumphant show of jewels pendent above the mountain. Burlen thought of that sublime hour he had passed on the summit with Edith, when their souls had flowed together, and they two had possessed that pinnacle as if they had been one happy life raised high above the common world. And now he must resign himself to loneliness and darkness, and to the chill of this sombre, hideous night. What did it mean ? What destiny was preparing for him ?

A wan gray dimness of light that was not morning's began to infiltrate the black spaces of the wood. Burlen heard a snake slip over the loose leaf-pavement close by him, but did not stir. He seemed to have come nearer to the snake since morning, and could almost sympathize with him : the day had been so terrible, he had grown so faint, humanity had begun to seem so far off — any touch of life was acceptable. The moon sent brighter rays into the obscurity, and presently the lost man noticed a small filmy ball swaying to and fro in the pallid glimmer, not three yards away. It was a spider's silky cradle-cocoon full of eggs, suspended by a long thread from a lifeless bough above, in such wise that a slight stirring of air caused it to swing with the regularity of slow clock-work. The motion of this petty

shape appeared to relate itself to the noiseless wheeling of that vast Scorpion design in the sky, so immeasurably far away. Were they not, in different degrees, measuring the same deliberate movement of Fate's mechanism? Little by little it related itself to another thing, — the most revolting in the world. It made Burlen think of the wretched shape of some condemned criminal tossed into the air to die, and swaying helpless with the strangling rope.

Then there arose among the branches overhead an unearthly sound. The breeze had freshened, and two limbs or tree-stems, growing in such a way that they chafed, emitted a desolate creaking under the stress of the rushing air. There is no sound in Nature more melancholy than this crazy cry. The tree that produces it is malformed, and the inarticulate shriek carries with it a thought of endless pain, — the helpless anguish of a doom that begins with birth, and is forwarded by the very act of growth.

Burlen started up and hurried on, unable to bear this sound. The moonlight now enabled him to see his way ; but finding an open spot and a smooth rock, he resolved to make a fire and camp there till morning. He lay down without other covering than a projecting bush supplied. But his anxieties and visions distressed him more than the hardness of his bed and the want of shelter. Hunger had made him light-headed, and he dreamed before he could sleep. He fancied himself pursued, hunted with dogs, — he did not know for what ; fierce glaring eyes surrounded him. Then all this changed, and he was hunting

himself. He could not find himself. Oh, now he remembered: he was lost. But how had he come into the woods? Why? Was he, after all, a criminal? Would they catch him; and what would they do to him?

With a sharp, fresh, foamy roar the gathering wind set on anew against the pines: their ominous murmur filled his ears. He fell asleep.

Before the light of dawn had fully risen, there began a moist, refreshing cheep and universal twitter in the branches round about, all the birds chirping very much alike, as if they had forgotten their species overnight. Comparative silence ensued. First there had been the general voice of the race: now there was a lull, — a kind of prehistoric period in bird-development; after which the notes began again, each in its separate sort. The cat-bird flung out its harsh remonstrance from a hazel-covert below; the jay indulged in the more musical of his two calls. Some robins were fluting with unusual alertness, apparently surprised at their own proficiency; and from a dreamier distance floated the happy aria of song-sparrows that had wisely builded near seed-bearing fields.

Burlen started up amid all this lavish music. He was lame with much walking and exposure; but the clear upward pulsations of the day-break sky, and the sweet wood-minstrelsy around him, gave him fresh vigor, and finding a rough path leading from where he stood, in a direction which he could now see would carry him home, he sat out at once. How

glorious the morning was, how different from the awful day just gone!

He had walked about five minutes, when he heard the rush of water, and came upon the rocky pool where he had so often bathed. There were the clear topaz current pouring into the natural basin, the big black ash close by it, and the thick screen of bushes on the opposite side. The loneliness of the place impressed Burlen, as he thought of the deed so lately done much nearer the highway, and he shuddered. Just then he heard trampling steps beyond the alders across the stream, and a new thought occurred to him.

"What if I should meet Whitcot's murderer prowling here?" he asked himself.

As if to settle this query, the bushes were parted and a face presented itself in the opening. It was that of Major Brown, in his usual broken silk hat bound with faded blue ribbon. This apparition was so unlike that of a possible murderer, which Burlen had just been imagining, that it became ridiculous.

"Ah, good morning!" cried the young man, with a smile.

Major Brown did not speak, and seemed still less inclined to smile. He picked his way carefully across the brook on some dry stones that formed a partial causeway, and when very near Burlen's side he produced from his side-pocket, with a casual air of having found it in his way there, a revolver.

"There's two more on us close behind," he said.
"I arrest you, Mr. Burlen, on a charge of murder."

XXV.

UNDER ARREST.

IN the early morning, Ravling, on the look-out at his tent-door for whatever might happen, saw the Sheriff and his party coming up the road with Burlen in charge, and hastened to meet them.

The young theologian gazed at him with a dumb astonishment and horror that gave no clew to his own conviction in regard to his guilt or innocence. Had his eyes been turned to stone, they could not have been less communicative. His color was wan, his hair disordered; the black-and-white spotted tie that he wore hung in two loosened strips fluttering uneasily below his impassive face. He did not go through any of the formalities of recognition, and yet there was a kind of vague appeal in the uncertain stare which he fixed upon Ravling.

The lawyer himself was, for an instant, checked by a sense of possibilities yet undetermined; but only for an instant. "We foresaw this yesterday," he said quietly to the prisoner. "Say nothing to these men till I have consulted with you."

Then Burlen found his voice, and his eyes began to live again. "But why?" he asked indignantly. "I am as innocent as you. I was lost in the woods."

"You knew where you were this mornin', 'pears to me," observed the Major, dryly. Burlen merely turned upon him a glance of cold scorn.

"I believe what you say, Burlen," Ravling assured him, quickly. "But the circumstances are going to make trouble. Innocent men are sometimes in the greatest danger. Prejudice is aroused, and you mustn't give it the advantage of misconstruing a single word. — What are you going to do, Mr. Brown?"

"Give him his clothes and something to eat. Says he's most starved," the Sheriff answered. "'T ain't reg'lar, maybe; but then we want a wagon for him, too, and I thought I might as well."

Major Brown was a trifle awed in the presence of Ravling's legal acquirements, and somehow felt that he was addressing a superior officer.

"Very well. Take my tent. I shall go with you to the village afterward."

The tent was immediately converted into a prison, while Ravling and the Major proceeded to the house. Archdale was called down and made acquainted with the fact of Burlen's capture. The poor old gentleman's calm temperament and steady hand had failed him this morning, and his erudite chin displayed a serious cut which he had given himself with his razor.

"I want to ask Robert one question, — just one. May I?" he inquired piteously, as if he himself were under arrest and unable to act without permission.

"Go ahead," said the Major, who was ambitious

to appear quite used to this sort of thing. "*I don't mind if he don't.*" He jerked his thumb at the tent.

"Wait a moment," said Ravling. "I would like to know what the question is, if you please. It may be important. And first I must see Miss Archdale. Will you ask her to give me five minutes? It is exceedingly urgent."

"Of course, if you wish it," said the Doctor, though his face expressed a criticism that the request was untimely.

"I think you should also tell her of the arrest," the young man proceeded undisturbed.

"Very well," Archdale again assented. He saw that he must be a follower at present.

In a few moments Edith came to the parlor, where Ravling met her.

"I am going to offer my services to Mr. Burlen for his defence," he said at once, "if you are willing." His manner was charged with a tenderness that tried to conceal itself under the deference and respect of a man who discusses some mere business detail with a woman upon whom great suffering has unexpectedly fallen.

She raised her head swiftly, and flashed an astonished inquiry upon him. "*You?*"

"Does n't it seem natural?" he asked.

She delayed answering. "I did n't know you felt such friendship for him," she then said, in a low voice. "I — I thought you had not so high an opinion of him as others."

"We were rivals," he answered frankly. "That

does n't make me his enemy. And now he is in need of immediate help, which it happens I may be able to give."

"But why do you come to me? Why not go to him?" she demanded, feeling that she had detected him in an effort, perhaps half unconscious, to make her lean upon his generosity.

"Because you have the best right to be consulted. Your father yesterday told me of your engagement, — formally announced it; though, of course, I knew of it before. There is no time to spare, and as you had this right to approve or refuse my aid, I wanted to ask you at once. Do you object?"

"Oh, Mr. Ravling, you *are* generous!" she cried. The look she gave him now was worth many disappointments. "You have called yourself selfish so long —"

"No, not always," he interrupted. "Don't you remember my telling you once that I could n't see why it was selfish to try to advance myself and gain a position, even without any very great aim perhaps? What I propose now may not be exactly selfish; but it is hardly more generous than that. I do it for my own good, too, because I wish to help you as well as Burlen; and I should be very unhappy if it were denied me." He waited a moment for her to reply.

"Do you consent to my service?"

"Consent? Why should I object?"

"I am not a criminal lawyer."

"And does that make a difference? Will it lessen the chance of a fair trial?"

"I know something of criminal procedure," he answered impartially. "And then I should get a young acquaintance of mine, who is strong in that field, to assist me. On the whole, I feel confidence in myself because of my personal knowledge of the situation. I think I should succeed."

Edith reflected a moment. It passed through her mind that a defeated rival in Ravling's position might gain a frightful triumph over the victor should he in any way misdirect the defence of life and honor. She could not suspect Ravling of villany; yet it cost her an effort to place such a vital trust in his hands, when that thought had once occurred to her.

"Confidence would in itself be a great help," she said slowly. "Tell me, Mr. Ravling, have you yet formed any idea as to who is really the criminal?" She looked steadily, penetratingly at him; and he was quick to see that the question meant, "Are *you* thoroughly convinced of Robert's innocence?"

His own eyes returned an involuntary assurance on this point, which she accepted. "Yes," he answered, "I have my idea. But I shall not breathe a word to any one until I have got something to go upon. That's my strongest hope in the case, and I must n't risk it by doing anything premature. You may be sure, though, that the person I suspect will be watched."

"I'm willing to trust it all to you," she declared impulsively.

"It is *you* who are generous," he said, his voice quivering a little.

As he took the hand she had eagerly put forth to press her own gratitude and courage into his, he longed to bend and touch his lips upon it, if only in token of resignation and farewell to what he had once believed he might win. What would he not have given to be allowed even a moment's unconcealed worship before her there! But he knew that the desire wronged his deeper sentiment toward her, and he went his way in silence.

She looked after him from the window, feeling that she had never adequately known him until this moment.

"What in the world could Mr. Ravling have to say at such a time?" demanded Mrs. Savland, who had just rustled downstairs and slipped into the room unnoticed. Edith told her the errand that had brought him. "Well, that is certainly very noble of him," said her aunt glibly. "But I wonder at his coming to you. Of course your relations with Robert Burden are at an end now."

"No, Aunt Grace, they've only just begun."

Mrs. Savland was silent for a time, while her niece continued looking out upon the morning sky, with tearless eyes and a burning at her heart. When Archdale, a few minutes before, had informed his sister of the situation, the magnitude of the disaster had at first palsied her tongue. In such an emergency even pulsatilla pills could not be counted on with any certainty. She stared vacantly at her brother for an instant, and then startled him with this announcement:—

"Thomas, we must go to Europe."

"Europe?" he gasped, fearing that her mind was unhinged.

"Yes; Edith and I. We ought to start at once."

"What for?"

"To get her away, of course. Harm enough has been done, Heaven knows; but she mustn't be mixed up in a murder trial; you can understand that, I hope. I must go with her immediately, and stay a long time, till this is all forgotten."

"But Robert —" he began.

At this point Mrs. Savland had abandoned him, and, in descending the stairs, she had caught sight of the lawyer leaving the parlor. Gathering her forces, she broached her project to Edith; but the girl turned upon her with a quiet intensity of disdain that, for the first time, opened Mrs. Savland's eyes to the full measure of the distance between them.

The lingering cynicism around her lips grew into a curve of lofty courage, as she answered in a voice divided by jarring notes of love and anguish: "I shall never leave Robert till this is over. Life is a tragedy, people say: well, it has begun for us as if it really were one, and he and I have our parts together. Whatever he has to bear I shall glory in bearing. I will be true now, — true to him, — even if I am never called on to be true again." Then, feeling tears of mortification springing to her eyes at the shame which her aunt's shrunken soul had put upon her love, she went swiftly from the room.

In the little square hall-way she came upon Mrs.

Pride. "Oh, my dear!" cried the poor housewife, trembling with pity; and then she put her stiff, veined hands on the young shoulders, unable to say more. "It'll all come right," she went on, recovering herself. "Martha Pride tells you so. Only don't go teening and crying, dear. They've made a mistake, that's all. Some one's got his head squiggled, and they've lighted on the wrong pusson. I've just been out telling Major Brown so, and tole him he'd better go hoppity-skippity after the real man putty quick, or he might git away. And now his breakfast's all ready. He was in the woods all night, you know; sh'd you s'pose it?"

"What? Whose? Have they caught the man who really did it?" asked Edith, confused. "Whose breakfast are you talking about?"

"Why, Mr. Burlen's."

"Oh, let me take it to him!"

Mrs. Pride hurried away, and returned with the tray she had prepared. But she found Mrs. Savland and Archdale in the hall, remonstrating.

"*That* I cannot allow," Mrs. Savland affirmed. "Your father will forbid it. Thomas!"

And Archdale, being commanded, began: "Edith, my child, don't you think —"

"Father, will you please open the door for me?" said Edith, quietly, with the tray in her hands.

He opened the door.

Ravling happened to be approaching the gate, and met her. He took off his hat. "Shall I tell Mr. Burlen you are coming?" he asked gently; and, upon

her consenting, he turned and moved on before her, still leaving his head uncovered.

The guards, — a constable and two assistants, all in plain clothes a good deal faded, and slouch hats, — moved away out of ear-shot of the tent, as they saw Edith coming. Her relation to the prisoner had promptly become known to them, and their official rigor was less strong than their American sense of duty towards a woman.

“Edith! Why have you come?” There was gratitude in Burlen’s tone; there was intense longing in it, too; but the pang he felt for Edith’s position and his desire to relieve her from it conquered these emotions.

“You ought not to ask,” she said sadly, yet trying to throw cheer into the words. “I wanted to, Robert. I longed to do something for you; and it just happened — oh, Robert, do you forgive me?” She had set down her burden and taken a step or two towards him, in a contrition that made her, he thought, more touchingly beautiful than he had ever seen her.

“Forgive you what, dear?”

“My anger and my selfishness. I hardly knew what I was saying. I did n’t mean it. I wanted so to tell you yesterday. I thought you knew the girl was your sister and were going to be cruel to her; and that, with the concealment — oh!” she sobbed, giving way; and putting her arm over her face, she leaned her head against the tent-post, wearily.

“I don’t wonder at it,” he said calmly. “I had

been drawn into a false position. If I had followed my own instinct everything would have gone well. I was for truth, not policy, and I ought to have held to it. But, Edith," he added, in sudden excitement, "you mustn't stay here. We're forgetting. . . . Remember what has happened to me! You must not be exposed to this."

"I wish to!" she exclaimed, lifting her head. There was a certain white, exalted light about her forehead. "I wish to bear it with you — whatever comes."

"But it is n't right," he urged, with increasing distress. "God knows I should like your help; I would like to have your arms about me. But I cannot! You must not even come near me until I have been justified from this shadow. Don't you see that? Trust me."

"If you tell me so," she said, that luminous quality still suffusing her face, "I will stay away. It will be harder for me, but I can do it. Whatever you think — that must be right."

He knew that he could not depend upon his own strength further, and, raising his hand, pointed silently towards the house. She lingered a little. "See if you can find your father," he said, trying to speak without agitation.

She moved; her lips shaped a "good-by," but the sound did not reach him. The two looked their farewell, that otherwise must have expressed itself in rushing tears.

XXVI.

PREPARING FOR A STRUGGLE.

THE question which Archdale wished to put to Burlen, as he speedily made known on arriving at the tent-door, was this: "What did you mean by that strange exclamation when the men first brought us word that Whitcot was — dead? You know, my boy, how I feel about you; but I want you to explain that."

The young man looked bewildered. "What exclamation?"

"Is it possible you've forgotten?" inquired his old preceptor, feeling that a chasm was opening between them, which might abruptly broaden and put them asunder. "You said something about Whitcot being killed, and you being in some way to blame: at least you said 'And it was I who —' *what*, Robert? You who — come, tell me what you meant! Don't you see how strange it sounds?"

"Did I say that?" returned Burlen, touching his hand to his forehead. Then, with a heavy return to memory, "Oh, yes! I see what you are recalling. I have been through so much since then. I know my first thought was, that, in my rage with Whitcot, I had told him that I wished he was dead; and there was my wish fulfilled before I had time to retract it.

I suppose I exclaimed something to that effect, did n't I?"

"Yes, Robert; those were the words I've repeated. Oh, if you had only finished your sentence!" Archdale clasped his hands in the vehemence of his regret.

"Why?" asked Burlen.

"Because others heard what you said, and it will be hard to explain them."

The young man felt as if he had tried to move one of his limbs freely and had found himself tied. The perception of how those guiltless words might be used against him reminded him that he had not yet fully comprehended what it was to be a prisoner under suspicion of capital crime. A momentary numbness of horror fell upon him.

"Never mind," he said, rousing himself on seeing Archdale's misery. "I am innocent. I can't be condemned for another's crime, unless God wills it. My own punishment has already come: it is enough that people can think for a moment I might have committed such a deed. Oh, what a stain! It's a stain that almost proves my unfitness ever to do good. And yet I deserve it, I know. I deserve it for that one moment of unbridled hate. How we planned and planned, Doctor, to evade the snares of my old misfortunes; and see how the evil fate that was born with me traps me, just when we fancied it was finally defeated!"

"Oh, not so! it's not so!" cried Archdale, getting down where he could half enfold him with one arm.

"Don't feel so, my boy! You exaggerate. I understand the pain of your conscience; but you will see, when you've come through this trial, that you're not unfitted for your high calling. Don't give up courage and faith in your mission, my dear fellow! Remember, you're my son: remember what we all expect from you!"

"I will," said Burlen, in a low, reverent voice. "Thank Heaven for such a father!"

And with one silent, firm embrace of the kind that men bestow on one another only when carried clean out of masculine consciousness into the realm where all suffering spirits meet on equal terms, — with one such embrace, they parted.

The telegraph had shot out messages from Savage's Mills as a centre to all parts of the country, detailing the violent end of Whitcot and the arrest on strong suspicion of "an eloquent young clergyman staying in the vicinity." Everywhere the news was acceptable as a relief from the vulgarity and monotonous repetition of average criminal reports. The great newspaper public quickly recognized the case as something select, and opinion went with swift unanimity against Burlen because of his sacred profession. The Linkinfoot scandal had warmed the general mind into quite a flaming and sulphurous scepticism as to the virtue of the clerical class, and a vast number rejoiced in the fact that this suspected man was a young minister, — as much as if the accusation against him established beyond doubt their own

exceeding uprightness. The local paper at Savage's indulged in safe innuendoes, alluding pungently to the former banking and defaulting pastor of the Second Church; and, though not daring to advance such a view himself, the editor reproduced an article from a metropolitan journal, which alluded to the Burlen case and the Linkinfoot scandal, and wound up by declaring that the "era of priestcraft" had gone by, and that the leadership of the clergy had practically given place to that of the press.

A Boston reporter also arrived, talked with everybody, flattered and looked down upon the local editor, and sent home a long account of the affair in numerous short chapters, giving Burlen's personal history, telling of the engagement with Edith, describing the "deportment" of the "supposed murderer;" and in all ways sacrificing decency and consideration to aid his own sensational success.

From nothing of this did Burlen shrink. He faced it all and studied it. Looking steadily at the cold, craven, unbeautiful side of human nature that was now turned upon him, he felt a separation taking place between himself and the race. Humanity receded from him like an ebbing tide; and yet he felt, too, strangely enough, that he was forming a new bond with his kind, which gave him power over it. The Rev. Franklin Bland forgot to offer him any support. But although Dr. Snowe came to see him once, in his cell, — a plain, cheerful room in an old jail otherwise untenanted, — he appeared scarcely at his ease; and the only companions

with whom he could really speak were Ravling and Archdale.

Mrs. Savland was more sensitive than he. She had made a second effort to withdraw Edith from the scene, but without avail; and then she took Viola under her wing and fled to Marle, in time to escape contamination, publicity, and the insinuating efforts of the interviewer.

"Oh, I do feel so sorry at having to leave you!" cried Miss Welsted to Edith. "But I see that I can be of no use in staying. You wouldn't have me do so, would you, Edith? And you know Longfellow says 'disasters come not singly': do you remember? —

" 'First a shadow, then a sorrow,
Till the air is dark with anguish.'

I'm sure it won't be so with you," she added, aware of the unfortunate choice of her quotation; "and my heart will be with you, even if I'm not here. Write to me, dear, when you can."

So Archdale and his daughter were left at the farm alone. The new term had begun at the Marle Theological School, but the professor succeeded in making a temporary arrangement to have his place supplied, feeling himself unequal to the resumption of his lectures.

In the mean time Ravling and his junior counsel took rooms in the village and worked hard in preparation for the case. The Grand Jury had fortunately met soon after Burlen's arrest, and had found their indictment: the trial was appointed to take

place within ten days. Both the advocate and the prisoner had no doubt as to where the guilt for Whitcot's death really lay; but they could not impart their surmises. The counsel for the defence were engaged in detective manoeuvres as well as in taking legal precautions. They were careful to have the ground well searched all around the scene of the murder, without letting that measure become known. Two unobtrusive men arrived at the hotel, who were supposed to be lightning-rod agents, but might have been noticed, had any one been keen enough to observe them, spending a good deal of time near the woollen-mill and taking an uncommon interest in one of its occupants. Twice Ravling drove up to the farm, and happened to be in the barn at the same time that Timothy was there, — a circumstance favorable to the quiet interchange of ideas and information. Once, too, there was a secret assembly in the deserted house with heart-shaped door-lights at the foot of the hill; and if the foot-prints near the threshold had been studied, three different shapes would have been discovered, — one of which would have exactly accommodated the shoe of Ida Hiss.

That, in fact, was the dilemma. Ravling had grown thin and worn by the time they were within two days of the trial; and the general belief among on-lookers was that he would fail to bring his client off.

This was the conviction expressed in an influential group collected in the office-room of the hotel, the night before the case was to be tried. Stubbs, as

the sole possessor of peculiarly damaging testimony, had much to say ; but Epenetus, Serious, and Absalom Savage were all present, — Absalom wearing a stunned look, which, ever since the first tidings of the murder reached him, had conferred upon him the air of having consummated his life-long effort at total deafness. This relieved him from even appearing to listen to discussion on a matter already so nearly settled. The rest found in the occasion a distinct need for the consumption of whiskey and for much difference of view on minor points. Each one considered it his duty to uphold a theory varying in some particular from that of anybody else.

Waddy, the barber, still clung to the idea that a plea of insanity would be set up. Without that, no murder trial could be complete.

Serious, after drumming on his teeth in masterly inactivity, put forward his argument that an *alibi* would be claimed.

“ I’ll tell you what *I* heard this morning,” said Major Brown, modestly assuming by his manner that any little contribution from him might not be duly heeded, even though it in fact decided the debate. “ I was told that the defence could not find any suitable line, and, quite ’s likely as not, will plead guilty and appeal for mercy.”

An awful hush followed these words, for it was known that the Major had been seen talking with the State’s Attorney, the Hon. Ebenezer McKnight, — a tall, raw-faced barrister with Jeffersonian manners, — who was at that moment shrouded in the

secrecy of an upstairs room, making his final notes for the prosecution.

But the hardware dealer, Card, succeeded in securing a unique ground, while steering clear of offence to any one. "I differ with you all, gentlemen," he began, with unwonted boldness. "I have my notions of what will be done; but the point is this, — the result is going to be very unexpected."

For an instant they half believed that he had uttered something denoting superior sagacity. Then Breck said to the Major, with some hesitancy, —

"Have you got the rope, Sheriff? I suppose you'll —"

"Time enough," answered that functionary, with the air of an old hand. "Have to get a new one every time, you know. I rec'lect Caldwell, — second cousin to R. V. Swift, Ser'ous, — Caldwell used to say when he went to the rope-maker's, if he'd got a man to hang, the manufacturer'd throw down his hands and tell him, 'There, I know just what you come for: take it and go!' Never would accept a cent for it, he would n't. And they furnish good stuff, too. Them ropes'll bear a strain of three thousand pounds."

They were all impressed; and Card, vainly hoping to find some way of voicing the general appreciation, asked with much gravity: "That's more than's necessary, ain't it?"

XXVII.

THE CRISIS IN COURT.

BUSINESS was almost suspended when the hour for opening the court arrived ; and most of the able-bodied part of the community poured into the pew-like seats of the big barren apartment, duly furnished with tables, chairs, and gutta-percha spittoons of that large official pattern which seems to bear some occult relation of peculiar fitness to the dispensing of justice in our courts.

Among the rest, Ida Hiss, Rudyard, and Timothy Pride, with his mother, were present ; and even Mother Savage, who had qualified herself by a course of criminal and litigious fiction pursued since the arrest, made her appearance, — her lips wound up into a knot on one side, missing the accustomed pipe now denied her. Breck, the jeweller, had difficulty in deciding on which of the too many objects of interest he should fix his earnest eye ; but at last he found it fascinated by Whitcot's father, who had made a deep impression in the village by the bitterness of his grief, and by ordering a piece of Monadnoc rock to be quarried for his son's tombstone at Marle. He had now come up expressly to watch the trial, having done all he could to assist

the prosecutor in securing evidence for Burlen's conviction.

It was a strange thing to see him sitting there, — a man of fifty-five, with a short beard, perfectly white but jauntily trimmed, darker hair parted at the crown, and clothes of a fashionable and over-youthful cut. Handsome, selfish, a man of the world, he looked like his son grown suddenly old, — a young man prematurely burnt out and ashen; but just under the white beard glowed a magenta silk neck-scarf (he refused to wear mourning), which might have stood for the last live spark of fire remaining in him. And it was plain from his face that all his fire was now converted into a desire for vengeance.

The judge entered, and the audience became subdued. The prisoner was brought in, and it began to recover tone. Notwithstanding the drift of opinion, there was no trouble about filling the jury until the name of Tarbox was called. Then Ravling entered a protest. Tarbox had been singularly affected by Richard's death. From having had him in his house for a while, he now seemed to confuse the dead man's identity with that of his lost son. He had been heard to talk loudly of inflicting speedy punishment on the young preacher, and was evidently becoming unsettled in mind. After a short debate, therefore, he was rejected *propter affectum*. This incident heightened the eagerness of the spectators.

" . . . That you will well and truly try and true deliverance make between the State of New Hampshire and the prisoner at the bar. So help you God."

These words being spoken for the twelfth time, and sworn to, the panel was complete, and the State's Attorney rose to open the prosecution.

He first ruffled an imposing shirt-bosom, which bore a small frill terrible as the comb of a fighting-cock, at the prisoner, the opposing counsel, the entire audience, and lastly — though in more deferential fashion — at the bench itself. This shirt-bosom was privately looked upon by its owner as one of the bulwarks of law and society; but it was only a part of his armor. Accusation resided in his very hair, high uplifted above his forehead; there was the glow of just indignation in his crimson cheek, and condemnatory scorn quivered in his long forefinger. He had in fact modelled himself on a distinguished advocate who had impressed him in his youth, and presented an old-school demeanor which carried conviction to the inhabitants of Savage's.

He finished his opening and came to the evidence.

First witness for the government, — Epenetus B. Savage. He appears promptly in the witness-box, rising up like an inky and discolored ghost. His testimony is brief; touches the finding of the body; also certain foot-marks in the vicinity leading towards the river and ceasing there.

Next a physician is called, — a supernumerary, to place the "properties" of the case. Gives routine evidence, bearing on the immediate cause and probable time of death.

Third witness, — Marshall Stubbs. He repeats the story of the quarrel overheard. His manner is

shrewd, deliberate, winning general favor. His narration, being dry even to unwillingness, only heightens the sensation produced when he recites Burlen's express wish that Whitcot might be obliterated. And when he imitates the accused man's action in flinging up his arms as he disappeared in the direction taken by Whitcot, the jury by a simultaneous movement fix their eyes suddenly on Burlen, with angered intensity.

Ravling tried to break the force of this attack by cross-questioning, but did not succeed well; and everybody thought him crushed. Stubbs was dismissed and Mrs. Pride sworn, to show that the prisoner, after the quarrel, had returned to the house with his clothes wet through; this in connection with the traces of foot-prints mentioned by Epenetus.

"Now, my good woman," said the prosecutor, growing portentously bland, "how did he explain his condition at that time?"

"He did n't say nothing at all about conditions."

The lawyer affected an indignant air. "Did you ask him how he got wet?"

"Yes. He said he had slipped and fallen into the river."

"And you believed him?"

Ravling started up. "We object to that question, your honor."

"Now, Mr. Ravling," interposed Mrs. Pride, "what do you go objectin' for? I'm only going to tell him the truth."

"The witness will be silent!" announced the judge, curtly.

Mrs. Pride threw him an indignant glance. "You need n't be so grumsy, anyhow," she muttered.

"We maintain," continued Ravling, "that the witness must be presumed to have given the prisoner's statement credence, unless special reason can be shown why she should not have done so."

The prosecutor fumed and persisted; but the judge looking out of the nearest window as if communing with some invisible monitor of justice posted there, declared the question inadmissible.

"Very well, then," said the attorney, sweeping around towards the witness again, and bringing the full force of his shirt-frill to bear. "Was there some reason why —"

"I object," cried Ravling. "'Was there *any*' is better."

The other lawyer, with formidable courtesy, took the suggestion. "Was there any reason why you should not believe his statement?"

"Of course there was n't," Mrs. Pride exclaimed. "And if there had n't been such a stewing and brewing about it, I'd have told you so long ago."

The State's Attorney went on to show the fact of Burlen's seclusion after his return, and his disappearance the next morning, immediately on the announcement of Whitcot's body having been discovered.

Cross-examined, Mrs. Pride declared that a young man, going out to walk under ordinary circumstances, had once lost himself in the same vicinity, and was found only after three days. "When he come out of the woods," she added, yielding to an

historic impulse, "he was thin as a pea-pod in a dry spell; most starved, too. But, law! we was all born—I *would* say mortal; and so I says, says I—" At this point, however, she was stopped, on the ground of irrelevancy.

The defence had begun to gain a little in public estimation; but Archdale's testimony, which followed, bringing in Burlen's enigmatic words connecting himself with the murder, told heavily against the prisoner. It now remained for the prosecution to complete the chain of circumstantial evidence, and suggest a sufficient motive on the part of the accused.

An account of Whitcot's supposed discovery that Ida Hiss was Thyrsa Burlen was drawn forth; and as the mysterious girl was present, she became suddenly one of the persons of the drama. Burlen looked across the space between himself and the place where she sat, and saw that her bold, dark, melancholy beauty was clouded with a dim blush; but otherwise she gave no token of interest. The final witness for the Government was Rudyard. No rumor of the many which had abounded had touched this man; yet as soon as he took the stand, every one in the room appeared to be sensible of something peculiar about his presence.

"Where were you," began the examining lawyer, "on the afternoon when the murder is supposed to have occurred?"

"Down by the river."

"State what took place there."

"I heard a noise in the woods, and then he," — jerking his head towards the prisoner, — "Mr. Burlen, I mean, came running to the bank."

On this, the prisoner looked the witness full in the face, with an indignant flash of the eyes. Ida Hiss started and leaned forward, gazing eagerly from one to the other. The blush had left her face, which showed a clear brown pallor in its place. Rudyard returned the young preacher's angry scrutiny with a steady, malignant stillness.

"Did you notice anything further?" was the next question.

"He jumped into the water," proceeded Rudyard, in a sullen voice, "and splashed around a great deal. He seemed to be rubbing his clothes."

"Was this far from the spot where the body was discovered?"

"No: not very far, I should say."

"Have you any doubt about it?"

"No, sir. It was near that place." Rudyard here slightly averted his face, and Burlen fancied that a look passed between him and Ida. The expression of dumb scorn on the girl's face, in reply, sent an indefinable thrill through his veins.

"Did it occur to you that the prisoner might have fallen in by accident?"

"No; he jumped in. He seemed in a hurry, and frightened. I thought there was something wrong, and hid behind a tree."

"Very well," said the attorney. He then questioned the woollen-worker as to his knowledge of

Whitcot's effort to prove that Ida was Burlen's sister. Rudyard affirmed that he had been aware of it, and that the candidate was furious with Whitcot, in consequence. Whitcot had said to witness that he feared violence.

In the cross-examination he seemed much less assured. Ravling's inquiries were swift: Rudyard was slow and confused in his replies. "Why were you afraid to be seen at the river?" asked the counsel for the defence, throwing a powerful significance into the words.

Rudyard grew uneasy; his gleaming gray eyes fell. At last he said in a chill voice: "I ain't afraid of him or any man. I didn't want him to see me: that's all."

"Oh," said Ravling, sarcastically; "perhaps you would n't like to have been seen by anybody, just then. Was that it?"

Rudyard glared at him and refused to answer.

"Were you on very friendly terms with the deceased?" the lawyer asked.

The man, having become exasperated, answered quickly, with a sneer: "No. I thought he was a fool!" The listeners in the court-room were visibly shocked; the jury assumed a wakeful air; old Mr. Whitcot darted a glance of astonishment at Rudyard, the color rising in his faded face as if the magenta scarf at his throat had become fluid and unexpectedly tinged the pale features above it.

"Ah! And how did you form that opinion?" asked Ravling, lightly.

"Oh, I thought he was. I had my reasons."

"And did that have anything to do with the fact, that, on the first day he came here, you dogged him at twilight, along the road?"

"How do you know I did?" demanded Rudyard, defiantly.

The State's Attorney rose to protect his witness, and thundered out a protest.

"I will alter the question," said Ravling, meekly. "Did you recognize the deceased, on the evening of the 6th of July, when you followed him along the road from Pride's?"

The witness allowed his eyes to turn towards Ida, then towards Timothy Pride; finally, they rested on Burlen. He was reflecting.

"I request that that question be excluded," said the attorney for the prosecution, again rising. The court sustained the objection; but an impression had evidently been made on the jury and the spectators.

The defence proceeded to put various inquiries respecting Whitcot's relations with Ida, tending to show that the foreman's jealousy had been aroused. The answers gained were not very satisfactory, but they showed in the witness a desire to conceal something.

"Has this got anything to do with the case?" asked the prosecuting attorney.

"We hope to show that it has a great deal to do with it," was the reply.

Ravling had not succeeded in breaking down Rudyard's testimony, but he had by innuendo produced

the feeling that the man was untrustworthy. At this point the court adjourned.

Of the hours of dread and gloom that intervened before the reopening of the court, it need be said only that they brought to Edith new fears and bewilderments, arising from the remarkable testimony of Rudyard. She scarcely dared to ask herself how this would be confuted, or what would be its final effect.

Meanwhile a hurried interview took place at night between Ravling and the Boston reporter, who produced a small and mysterious article which he had picked up in the fatal wood. He had just been completing a fresh examination of the spot, and the discovery he had made there was so vital in its bearing on the case that Ravling at once forgave him all the annoyance he had caused by his publications. Hastening to the jail, he consulted with his client and returned full of excitement to his office; after which he contrived a secret conference with Ida, whom he had subpœnaed as a witness for the defence.

The next morning judge, jury, lawyers, and the public were all arrayed in their places as if they had never moved; and the trial recommenced. The defence brought forward some routine evidence to the good character of the prisoner. Burlen followed, telling his own story, and remaining firm under cross-examination; and then Archdale was put on the stand to explain the "morbid conscientiousness" of

Burlen's mind, as accounting for his associating himself with the guilt of the murder because he had wished Whitcot dead. From this, counsel glided on to disclose through Archdale what Whitcot had told him of Rudyard's threatening attitude. But here the Government attorney sprang to his feet, and asked wrathfully whether the witnesses on his side were to be tried for their lives, instead of the prisoner. "From the first, your honor, there has been a most vicious assault by the defence on this witness Rudyard, and we cannot allow it to go on." There was a sharp contest; Ravling and his junior exerted all their force, and pleaded, that, painful as it might be to even seem to direct suspicion towards an unaccused person for a moment, a monstrous injustice might be done were they not allowed to pursue this inquiry. They prevailed at last, and followed up what they gained in this way with a brief statement from Edith.

She narrated her engagement, Whitcot's attempt on the day before his death to estrange her from Burlen, and the absence of any threat against the engineer on Burlen's part, even when the perfidy had come to light.

Ida Hiss was called next. It was a great surprise to the crowd; she herself, also, appeared half dazed by the summons, and took her place with an expression of anxiety unfamiliar to those who had seen most of her. No one, perhaps not even she, knew what she was going to say; but at moments during the morning she had measured forces with Rudyard in

long, terrible, undecipherable glances, which seemed to presage something important.

Ida began with particulars concerning the plan which Whitcot had formed of proving her to be the sister of the accused. He had tried to persuade her to enter into this plan. Did Rudyard know of it? Yes, she had told him a little. Had the engineer ever expressed to her any fear of Burlen? No. Had she seen Whitcot often? Not very; she was afraid to? Why? Because Rudyard was jealous, and thought Whitcot was making love to her. Perhaps she had given him some reason to think so, — had teased him about it only a few days before the murder; she did n't know why; out of mischief, she supposed.

Once more the prosecuting attorney attacked the line of defence, and succeeded in getting one or two questions and answers struck off the record.

But at this point something unforeseen happened. Burlen (previously instructed by his counsel) was looking very keenly at the witness, who apparently wavered before his scrutiny. All at once Ravling produced from his breast-pocket a small article, — a breast-pin made of fine woven hair, — and held it up close to her. "Is this yours?" he asked.

The girl uttered a gasping sound, like a stifled scream. "You know!" she cried, trembling. She sought Burlen with a yearning gaze that quickly fired up into a look of supreme resolution. "He's innocent!" she cried. Then, with hands thrown wildly across her eyes: "Rudyard did it! He told me."

The court-room was in absolute confusion for a moment or two, people rising to look over those in front; a hum of voices charged with horror, surprise, triumph; the State's Attorney, in his loudest tones, inquiring what this irregular procedure meant, and what was the potent talisman in his learned brother's hand, which had not yet been put in evidence.

"If the court please, I will now put this trinket in evidence, and proceed with further testimony," Ravling promptly declared.

Ida identified it as an ornament made of her mother's hair, and belonging to her. Order being restored, Ravling said to her: "State what you know as to the commission of the murder." Despite the clarion vigor of his tone, his voice quivered. He was not quite sure of his witness.

In few words, however, — rapidly, as though fate were on her track to stop the revelation, yet with a wild, fixed energy, — the girl told how, on her irresponsible and mischievous incitement, Rudyard had let loose his ferocity, had met, overpowered, and killed Whitcot in the wood, and had then told her of his deed and besought her to fly the place with him, which she refused to do.

All eyes were bent on the woollen-worker; voices began to exclaim, "Look! look!" He sat with his head stretched forward, while his body still leaned back cravenly upon the bench. His hands clutched and tugged at the wood of the seat on either side of him; his eyes seemed to retreat under his fore-

head, and a glistening moisture came out on his face. Those nearest drew away from him, while, with an oath, he muttered unsteadily, "It's a lie!"

"Look at that man, gentlemen of the jury!" cried Ravling, with outstretched arm.

The prosecuting attorney remained motionless, and no longer attempted to interfere. Ravling went on swiftly to prove that the breast-pin had been taken by Rudyard, a few days before the murder, and was carried in his pocket; also that it had been found by the reporter on the spot where the crime was done, and that it was blood-stained.

The jury, without rising, gave their verdict: "NOT GUILTY."

Rudyard, attempting to stride out of the room while the evidence was finishing, was arrested and taken to jail.

XXVIII.

REUNION AND SEPARATION.

BURSTING from the prisoner's dock, Burlen crossed the court-room as well as he could, and approached the flushed, startled woman whose timely utterance had saved him.

"Thyrsa! you *are* Thyrsa, — sister!" he cried. "I knew it when they brought me that little ornament: I remembered. Oh, Thyrsa!"

She shuddered and held back for an instant, but over her handsome, shadowed face, — so hard before in its secretive, complacent insolence, — there was stealing a swift and peculiar change: the tenderness of an affection long sealed up or perverted crept into it with the softness of young springtime. She put her arms around his neck, and — poor thing! — for an instant it seemed as if she had never really been beyond the reach of that strong, brotherly embrace that now enfolded her. "I am so glad!" she sighed.

So it was this unhappy, outcast sister — she whom he had imagined would disgrace him for life — who first welcomed him back to life, and rescued him from the greater shame that had overcast his horizon. And Edith stood by, silently watching.

“You must come with us and stay with us now,” she said in a low voice, holding out her hand.

Thyrsa looked at her with deep, sorrowful eyes, and shook her head. “You are a good woman,” she said; “but oh, I cannot! I cannot! There is something here —” She made a strange gesture, as if she would have torn out some unseen root of pain from her breast, to fling it away. “You never could understand; you could n’t really love me. I will try to be good and do something for you and Robert; but I must n’t stay with you.”

“Yes, always,” said Burlen, gravely. “Your place is with me, now, Thyrsa, and mine with you.” When they were alone he asked, “Why did you refuse to claim me so long?”

“Can’t you see?” she began, almost complainingly. “God knows,” she went on in a different tone, “I wanted to get back to you; but — I knew I was a dark cloud; there was no hope for me. Why should I agree to come and spoil your bright prospects? But now, dear Rob, I’ve been able to help you. When I found myself there in court and you really in danger, I had to let you know who I was. And, oh, that horrible secret of Rudyard’s! I should have died if I’d kept it much longer. It seems like a fever. I was afraid, at first, — afraid of him, — and hoping you would come off without your knowing I was your sister.”

Burlen had taken her at once to Pride’s; but, although she was docile enough to consent to that, she would not agree to any association with the rest

that might embarrass them, and so remained in her own room or with Mrs. Pride. The situation was more than awkward; it was acutely painful and harassing for all concerned, and Burlen speedily became aware that out of it would probably spring some decided and serious change affecting his engagement with Edith.

"How sad you seem, still!" Edith said to him, as they stood at the porch of the old house that evening. "Ought n't you to be happy, now that everything has turned out so well, and you have found Thyrsa?"

He looked long and thoughtfully at her; but for all the tenderness that she saw in his eyes, the look seemed rather to separate than to draw them nearer. "I am so altered, Edith," he answered in a voice level and listless, and not graduated even to the intonations of despondency. "This ordeal that I have been through—I don't know what it has done to me."

"How?" she asked, growing anxious.

"In the way of taking all the joy and color out of some things, that before were the fullest of delight. I'm like those clouds up there. See! Imagine sunlight on them, and you have the difference between what I was and what I am."

Above the locusts the clouds, as she saw, were feebly silvered by a new moon, — as if they were the same that had floated there during the day, but had now been transplanted to some other world, and like ghosts were looking back with infinite sadness on this one.

"That feeling will pass away, I'm sure," she urged. "It's natural that you should be depressed now, but —"

He laid one hand on hers as she touched his shoulder with it. "How good it is to be free and with you again!" he exclaimed, though not vehemently. "But to-morrow — to-morrow we will talk of these other things. I don't yet know how to tell you all that's in my mind."

In the morning an incident of some importance led to the deferring of this intention. There had, of course, been a great revulsion in Savagensian circles on the sudden and dramatic ending of the trial, and the church committee held an extraordinary meeting without delay, to prepare congratulatory resolutions for the victorious defendant. A week before, no one in the village had dared to uphold a firm belief in the innocence of Burlen; but now, with a promptness in making reparation which is perhaps a national trait, and with a readiness to act showily on emotions soon to be forgotten, which may possibly without injustice be put in the same category, the committee decided to invite the acquitted candidate to become pastor of the Second Church. Marshall Stubbs, hearing of this, manifested his disgust as far as seemed politic. But the brief era of his importance as the chief Government witness was over, and after collecting an exaggerated bill for his services in that capacity he vanished. The church committee meanwhile proceeded to Pride's, and waited on Burlen.

His colloquy with them was brief. He accepted their offer at once, for a year.

When Archdale was informed of this he made vigorous objection, and again displayed the advantages of the assistant-pastorate in Boston; but the young man was not to be dissuaded. "I have thought it all over," was his reply. "Circumstance brought about a strange crisis in my life here, and seems to have pointed out this spot where I've been vindicated as a good one to begin my true career in. My ambition is n't merely geographical or pecuniary; and here at Savage's I shall find earth and heaven, virtue and sin, all represented. Those are the elements I should have to deal with anywhere. I will meet them here."

"I suppose you are right," said Edith, on his putting the decision before her; but there was perhaps a slight note of apprehension observable in her voice.

"There are things to consider about our future," he replied, gravely. "Let us walk, this afternoon, and then we shall be free to say all that we wish."

It was October, and the leaves had begun to fall early. Here and there, like scattered remnants or memories of more prosperous times, spots and dashes of vivid, reckless color were retained by the boughs; but in general the landscape was reduced to a meagre and sinewy aspect. The sky assumed new prominence, and had become a far more important element of the scene than it had been three weeks before. Instead of walking through lofty, leafy alleys as at that time, the lovers found themselves unexpectedly

exposed to the broad overhanging surface of the heavens when among the trees, — as if a new light, a new revelation, had suddenly come over the world, bringing celestial supremacy into clearer notice. Earth seemed to have shrunk, to have flattened and grown chilled with a premonition of winter; the sky, in its new prominence, wore a vigilant look. On this afternoon it did not permit a single cloud to obscure its scrutiny of things below: there was even something about it approaching the vindictive and merciless.

“Do you think,” asked Burlen, “that you could be content here?”

“If you think you would be happy,” was her answer.

He was silent, and sighed. Then, “It is n’t that that I fear. I have been thinking that I should have too much happiness.”

She had fancied he was speaking in play, but something in his demeanor jarred on this idea. “How do you mean?” she asked.

“I will tell you,” he said, “just what has been passing in my mind during the time of my accusation and imprisonment. That charge of murder was like an earthquake shock. A single flash of anger was what led to such an awful suspicion, and it clouded over all my triumph in your love and put me for a time into the dust. If it had n’t been for this, I should never have been able to separate myself in thought from you, so as to see what I now do. But now it seems to me that I was wrong in seeking

for the happiness that other men find. The mere fact that I loved and had won your love, involved me in all the turmoil of motives and passions that the world keeps up, and so it was possible for the suspicion of hatred and deadly crime to fasten on me."

"Do you wish to be free?" she asked slowly, in subdued tones, without flinching.

Where they stood, some outstretched branches hung their few leaves like flashes of dull fire against the dim blue distances; Monadnoc lay across the valley at their left, dissolving the glowing tints of its woods in a serene depth of beryl; and not far from them the desert-spot shone under the waning sun. Burlen was recalling their former speculations upon the semblance of those two figures whom they had supposed to be on the eve of a parting.

"I can't answer you in one word," he at last began to say. "I do not wish to be free, and yet I feel it my duty, now, to be so. If you leave me, — if I lose you, —" the agony in his face showed her in an instant what he would have said. "I can hardly endure it," he cried, "now that I speak of it! My heart seems to break down and leave me nothing, — not even hope for my chosen work, — if I must do it without you."

The pain, the hidden anger perhaps, which had at first shot its twinges through Edith, was converted into pity and a troubled sympathy for her lover on seeing the strange, unlooked-for grief into which he had fallen. "Tell me all that you feel, and let me help you, Robert," she said quickly. "I know that

I'm not great enough to be your companion. I might often fail. You remember I had great doubts of myself when you first asked me. I have had other ambitions. I wanted to shine, you know, in — ”

“ Oh, no, no! it's not that. It is not any of those reasons,” he interposed. “ And it's not only the duty to myself I've already mentioned, to keep clear of entanglement in a love and interests of my own that might make me less useful to others. There are other duties, too; the duty to Thyrsa and the duty to you, — to free you from the dull wretchedness of a family tie with her, and to let you find some wider and brighter life in the big world than I can give you here.”

Edith's courage, too, began to fail. “ You talk to me of these cold things,” she said, the tears beginning to sparkle in her eyes. “ Oh, I have always felt that in some way destiny would drive us apart!”

“ Not destiny,” he protested, “ for if we do not carry out all that we hoped, it will be from something higher than destiny, if you mean by it an uncontrollable fate. It will be from choice, because we think it is better; and that is character, conscience. That controls even fate.”

She regarded him carefully, and with regained composure asked: “ Do you really think I have failed towards you since this last trouble came to you?”

“ You have been perfect in wish and action, Edith. Where should I look for my ideal of womanhood if not to you?”

"And would it make no difference," she continued, "with your notion of duty to me, if I were to say that I am ready to make every sacrifice that may be needed, and wish as much as you can to treat Thyrsa like a sister?"

"It could make no difference," he said, as if trying to assume a coldness foreign to him. "My duty to you would be the same, however you might wish me to ignore it." The desire to be understood got the better of his assumption, however, and he went on. "The duties, I think, are all bound up together. If it is an inspiration, — this thought that I should devote myself to ministering to my kind, — I must follow it out. Once I believed that I must give up everything and search for Thyrsa. Then I found that there might be a larger duty, to the race. And now again, when I have been fancying that it was essential to my mission that I, too, should have love and happiness and a home, so as to learn in my own life what others need, it once more seems to me that I must make renunciation. I'm not propounding a theory. I should never lay down a law for other men. They must discover their own best way of doing the best work, and I mine. But if you have ever believed what you admired in my poor sermons, — why, if I believe it myself, — I must act on what seems to me the highest inspiration. Don't you yourself think that's true?"

"I think you must follow your highest inspiration," she answered. She scarcely felt herself strong enough to say more; at the same time Burlen was

aware of an access of courage and brightness in her effect upon him. "You shall be free," he heard her add.

He took her hand and, holding it in both his, hung over it, reading every delicate line on its flexile surface, as if he traced there the mystery of life and death, of woe and blessing, and some ineffable answer to the riddle involved in these. But the profound impulse of his passion for her rose again and almost mastered him; the bitterness of denying himself that conquering sweetness of which he had become conqueror on the mountain-top was well-nigh unendurable. "Ah, who could have imagined it, a few days ago!" he cried brokenly. "Could I have foreseen it — I who have loved you so?"

"We must not wait here," she said hurriedly, and drew away her hand. "It is not good for us;" but she gazed at him as if her eyes, at least, would never depart from before him. How gentle they were, how sad! And how, in their gentleness, they burned into his very heart! It was strange, now, to look back to the time when they had been proud eyes, and when this sweet face, which for a little while belonged to him, had seemed far-off and carelessly, cynically content in its isolation. "Let us part bravely," she adjured him, as he hesitated.

They offered no last embrace, no farewell kiss. It was only a strong pressure of two hands, a look of sublime frankness and mutual honor, with which they parted.

Perhaps if they had allowed themselves a syllable

more, the least additional endearment, the strained courage of both would have snapped, and they would have remained together. Never, I am sure, was there a stranger severance of the compact between two lovers. Outwardly cold, abrupt, possibly needless, there was a peculiar exultation about it which sustained them for a time; yet anguish was busy within them. Faintly wafted to them came the melancholy, lingering note of a pewee, the saddest sound of autumn, the audible "Alas!" of departing summer; but, otherwise, the hush of a trance was in the air. Above, leaned the cold, vigilant sky; and that wide ærial field the sunset—with no wonted appanage of clouds to rumor and repeat its glory across half the heavens—was contracted into a lonely blaze on one particular small arc of the horizon.

As they thriddled their way back among the denuded trees, the occasional light, dead fall of a leaf sent through Burlen a shudder, as if it were the dropping of dust into a grave.

XXIX.

CERTAINTIES AND UNCERTAINTIES.

THAT evening, Edith and Burlen both received notes from Ravling, whom they had not seen since the brief congratulation that passed at the time of the trial. He wrote to say that he had been obliged at once to go to Boston without telling them in person how much happiness he wished them; "but I am sure it is in store for you," said the letter to Edith, "without any need of aid from my wishes." That to Burlen contained these words: "Your life is free now; the shadows have all been driven away at once. I look for sterling deeds and a fine example from you."

Burlen handed the note in silence to Edith, as he took hers to read. "Yes," she said presently, "your life is free!"

At this instant a stifling doubt attacked the young minister: he wondered whether he had acted under some morbid infatuation; whether after all the sacrifice that he was making might be needless; and whether he had been generous or ungenerous to Edith. To receive these words from his defeated rival, just at the time when he himself had surrendered the result of victory, was terribly trying.

"You are free, too, Edith," he answered. "To me your happiness is dearer than my own, by far; but I believe I am serving it. At least I try to believe that. If I can ever do anything —"

She saw that he trembled, and that he was on the point of breaking down. "If you will write to me, Robert, that will be a great deal. I shall want to know of everything you're doing here."

"Ah, Edith, that was what I had hoped!" He drew a little nearer. "Why—child," he said, impulsively — "I'll say once, my darling — do I seem to you wrong? Am I doing you an injury?"

"You are doing right," she said. "But oh, how can I bear it all?" That cry of her aching heart escaped unawares; but she summoned her fortitude again. "Good-by, Robert. Do not tell papa till we go away. I must leave here to-morrow."

Nevertheless, Archdale saw that something was weighing heavily upon them. The next day Edith was unable to stir; but Burlen went with Thyrsa to the village, and engaged temporary quarters to be used until he should move into the parsonage. "But we shall see you soon at Marle?" queried Archdale. "And oh—of course you will bid us good-by to-morrow, at the station."

Burlen turned his head away. "I shall not be coming to Marle," he said, huskily.

"Not coming? What can that mean? Has Edith broken with you?"

"We can never marry, Doctor Archdale."

The elder man drew himself up with austerity.

"That will need further inquiry and explanation, Robert. Do I understand that you reject the engagement, after all that she has been called upon to suffer for your sake?"

"Understand what you will," retorted Burlen, proudly. "I am obeying my duties. Edith and I agree."

Archdale was obliged to have recourse to his daughter for further knowledge of the situation. At first he repulsed it with impatience. "The boy is beside himself!" he exclaimed. "It is all a chimera. The mischief, so far as concerns Thyrsa, is done: that can't be helped. I would have saved you from it, if I could, but now that she is identified we must make the best of it. As for this notion of breaking the engagement — don't you see the injury done to yourself? But it all arises from inexperience: you neither of you know the world."

"And perhaps the world does n't know *us*," hinted Edith, mildly.

So, little by little, it became manifest to her father that the careful fabric of his dreams based on Burlen must undergo a complete remodelling, if indeed it was not already crumbled beyond hope of reconstruction. Much in the same way, there came to the young minister also a clearer perception from day to day of the desolation that now surrounded him. When he had seen the train that carried Edith away disappear down the track of the little sylvan railroad which only three months ago had brought him hither in so happy and expectant a mood, he

began to understand to how lonely a life he had consigned himself, what a terrible vacancy remained for him to fill with abstract inspiration; and he shrank before it. Treacherous crevices of doubt and weakness revealed themselves in the foundation of courage and idealism which he had thought so solid. He turned away, sick and dispirited, to take his place in the unpromising home which Thyrsa and he were to make together, and a sarcastic smile rose to his lips as his mind went back to the day of his graduating address at Marle. "*This* is not much like enthusiasm," he muttered to himself.

Society was naturally shocked at the whole affair, — the unpleasant complication into which Edith had been drawn by her connection with Burlen, and the breaking of the engagement afterward. "But of course nothing else was possible," Mrs. Savland took every occasion to say to her friends, "after such a dreadful scandal with the sister, and the murder and arrest, and all that, you know. It's very unfortunate for the poor young man, I admit — such a promising young preacher, too! No one can be sorrier for him than I; but you'll agree with me, I'm sure, that Edith did the wisest thing, and probably the kindest thing towards him, in breaking off the engagement." She never for a moment allowed it to be supposed that the loosing of the tie had been the result of Burlen's decision. Unfortunately for her, Edith would not support these tactics. She had little to say to any one; but when she spoke to Viola and a few

others with reference to the history, she distinctly made known the grounds on which the marriage had been abandoned.

The topic, for a while, was in vogue among Edith's Boston friends: they included it with plaques and rare porcelain, scientific lectures and Cambridge gossip, and the latest musical virtuoso or the newest critical utterance on Wordsworth, as being adapted to refined debate, which — it was understood — must never become very earnest. It became the fashion to sustain any one of several conflicting views about it, which ladies displayed like the approved shades of ribbon for that season, — effective enough until they should go out of date.

One day in November Ravling went to see Viola, and found her just rising from the piano. A tall young gentleman with a white forehead, and a violin in his hand, stood near the instrument. It was the Rev. Franklin Bland.

"Ah," said the lawyer, with his usual suavity, "I did n't know you had come to town. Are you making us a visit, or —"

"Oh, dear, no!" said the clergyman, lightly; "I've come to stay. There was a poor young fellow who wanted a place, and I told my handful up at Savage's that if they would keep up the little church I'd pay his salary for a while. Fine chance for a sacrifice on my part, you know. But," he concluded, smiling significantly, "I'm almost reconciled to the change. There would have been a vacancy there soon, anyway: death from ennui, you know."

Before long the Reverend Franklin took his leave gayly ; but Ravling for some reason imagined that he would not have gone so soon, if the interruption had not occurred.

"Have you heard anything, lately, from Miss Archdale?" he asked, when the outer door had closed.

"Yes, she's coming to Boston, later in the winter. She will be with me."

"I'm glad to hear that. I wonder how she is. How strangely it has turned out, — that affair with Burlen. I got to admire him greatly, at the time of the trial ; but I confess I don't quite understand his conduct. What do you think?"

"I hardly know," said Viola, bending her head slightly sideward, as if she were critically examining a picture with regard to its "values." "Edith is quite as puzzling. She seems reconciled."

"Perhaps it's all right," Ravling conceded ; "but, judging for myself, I should say he had been enormously selfish about it, in some ways. He's a man of ambition, — pure and spiritual ambition, I grant ; but I remember thinking, before now, with reference to him, that such a man might be as selfish as a smaller one. And then it strikes me — by the way, it was to you I was saying something of the kind at Marle, this last summer. It strikes me that he's mistaking a morbid and temporary state of mind for the prompting of that heroic enthusiasm he talked to us about. — And so you think Miss Archdale is content?"

Viola found it necessary to add a corrective touch to her criticism. "That may not be the right word," she said; "but I think she has accepted her life as it is. I don't believe she'll ever marry. I can appreciate her condition exactly. It's not happy, yet it's not entirely despairing. Ah," — Viola gave signs of growing sentimental, — "I know what it must be! That exquisite line of Byron's gives exactly what I mean —

"'With just enough of life to feel life's pain.'

Have you never had such times in your life, Mr. Ravling?"

"Oh, I dare say," he responded, a little brusquely, and began to ruffle his beard as he frowned at the carved piano-bench across the room. "When will she be here?" he asked abruptly, getting up.

"In December, I think." Viola looked up at him with a sort of meek apprehension, as if divining that he had conceived some new hope concerning Edith.

To Ravling she seemed at that instant so pretty in her infantile calm, with her fair hair and the dark-green velvet walking-dress in which she had come in before Mr. Bland's arrival; she was so patiently waiting for something in life that had not been attained; it was so clear that she admired him, — that, for a moment or two, he half fancied he could place himself at her feet and ask her to discard her frail sentimentality in favor of an every-day, practical affection. "I'm certain," he mused, "that that fel-

low Bland means to do something of the sort ; " and the reflection inspired in him a transient jealousy. The next instant, however, he held out his hand and said, " Good-by."

Viola ran upstairs as soon as he had left her, and began to write a sonnet, which she timidly hoped might distantly recall Petrarca or Mrs. Browning — if it should ever be published. This was, with her, a period of much mental activity. She had a good many little poems laid away in a scented drawer, to which she sometimes fled for consolation ; and she was debating with herself in these days whether she should get them printed at her own expense. They were of two sorts ; and the question that disturbed her was, ought she to select the pallidly beautiful ones and issue them in a vellum cover with gold lettering, or put together those which were picturesque, passionate, and bring them out with a " colorful " binding of eccentric design ? She could not decide ; but at last, during the winter, it was whispered around that she was soon to become an authoress, and there duly appeared a small book with broad margins and ragged edges, called " Plumelets From The Poets," — a selection from New England writers, with appreciative notes and a chaste introduction, in which the poets after being picked had their feathers returned to them in the handsomest manner.

After an interval, Edith began to receive letters from Burlen. Sometimes they contained details of his ordinary duties and trials, — the narrowness and

the prejudices among his people that obstructed him, or the fine traits and encouraging things that he met with here and there. "It occasionally seems belittling," he said, in one, "to shut myself in to this narrow range; but it is the dry soil which needs rain, and why should n't I expend myself where refreshing and fructifying influences so seldom come? To do so *must* ultimately bring a result proportioned to the cost. Self-denial is a duty with regard to intellectual passion — the passion for influence or fame — as well as with regard to other kinds.

"In this country especially, perhaps, we measure a man's ability, or the strength of his alliance with divine power, by his capacity to impress great masses of people. It is a serious error; for that test, though good in some things, is crude. So we are taught to push ourselves with the crowd, when we ought to be devoting ourselves to making life better, truer, happier, in a small circle. Our finest minds, in the effort to get broad and profitable recognition, are often made selfish and worldly."

In another letter he told of the marriage of Timothy Pride and Ann Fernlow. "Little Ann, whom it was my pleasant duty to join in wedlock with Timothy, is so happy that I am happier myself in thinking of it. They have gone to live in the house with heart-shaped door-lights, at the branch-road, having repaired and fitted it up; and a cheery domestic light shines out of those apertures once more at night; though one can't see into the hearts, on account of the innocent white dimity that screens them."

A few other things that interested Edith in these communications may be quoted.

“Certainties and uncertainties, — what are they? I find I can’t always tell. Now and then a great despondency assails me, and I seem to have made a fatal mistake. I recur to former thoughts and aspirations, only to laugh at them. But while I am still laughing, their meaning becomes clear; I see that they were true, and find myself, before I know it, nerved for the struggle again.”

“I have told you before about Rudyard’s confession, and his sentence to death. I wish I could give you some idea of the extraordinary conversations I had with him in jail. All the ordinary resources of schools and books I found entirely useless at first, and I had to depend on my own way of getting at him. It was all the harder, because I would not allow myself any of that sickening sentimentality with which clergymen usually surround the last hours of the condemned. Whatever mercy awaits them beyond this life, it seems to me irreverent to make them ascend the gallows with hallelujahs like those a pure-lived martyr might utter when dying in a noble cause. I tried to touch him into manliness and penitence, and partly succeeded. Perhaps I could n’t have done this, if it had not been for the discipline of my own recent accusation.”

“You ask about Thyrsa. She is trying very hard

to wake to higher interests than she has known. She studies a good deal, and makes a patient house-keeper; but there is something dark and unruly in her mind, which makes it difficult for her to grow upward. It is a part of that latent primitive savagery of our nature, which we see constantly cropping out on the surface of the race's life in so many ways, and breaking out in the most cultivated families. But there is room for hope. People are always ready to recognize this primitive evil force; why shouldn't we also count upon a primitive force of good?"

"Ideality evades us even while we try to be most ideal. When we achieve high results, there is so much imperfection in them and in us that they seem intangible. If we stood in the rainbow, probably we should not be aware of the fact. Now that I am living here in daily sight of Monadnoc, which used to appeal to me like a guide and helper from the horizon, there are days when I scarcely feel sure that it is still the same mountain."

"The future changes shape as one approaches it, just like this mountain. When it is reached, one does not always recognize it. I often think of this in connection with the growth of the Republic, which is not entirely what the founders hoped for. They saw it fair and clear a long way ahead, and drew its shape for us distinctly; but how distorted and disappointing it is, amid all its grandeur, when com-

pared with that distant view of it which they recorded ! The true Republic is still far off."

"Nothing, I am sure, will ever regenerate society, purify religion, lift up this country of ours to the height of its noble opportunities, except greater simplicity and integrity of life, and more vigorous insistence upon principle as against policy. But intimidation and anathema will not bring these about. The revolution must be worked by examples of honor, generosity, self-sacrifice, in countless individuals. Here in my small, unstoried way, within my limits, I am determined to try for such qualities, and leave the reward — if there's to be one — to others. It is not language, but *lives*, that can revive pure and sane religion, or honesty in government, or health in society. What we need is not so much prayer as *persons*, in the largest, soundest, holiest sense of that word, — persons through whom shall be conveyed the clear, strong tones of truth divine and human."

They were peculiar letters for a young man to be writing to a young woman ; and it appeared to Edith's friends — Ravling, among others — still more peculiar that she should be in correspondence with Burlen after what had passed. But she found a satisfaction of her own in these missives. "Your letters," she wrote back, "have an undertone of melancholy in them : I think it's because you face life so seriously, and will not blind yourself to the mean and discouraging things in it. And yet your tone is

not dispiriting. I suppose it is well to see the worst before hoping for the best. Every time I read your words it is like getting a cool breeze from the solemn, grand, health-giving mountain."

The winter had almost gone when Edith astonished Ravling with a piece of news. "What do you suppose I'm going to tell you?" she began.

"Something pleasant about yourself, perhaps."

"No: about Viola. She's engaged to be married."

The lawyer suffered a slight shock; but knew that, after all, it was not serious. "I can guess to whom," he said. "It must be the Reverend Franklin."

"Yes." Edith was radiant with satisfaction.

"That's very nice," said her caller, perfunctorily. "I congratulate Mr. Bland. Well, I have some news about myself, too."

"Of the same kind?" she asked smiling. Her eyelids drooped a little, and there was a tinge of reserve in her manner, as befitted an inquiry of this nature.

"No, indeed," he answered, in the same fashion of conventional amiability. He wondered just what sort of interest lay behind her smiling question. "No; it's merely that I've begun trying to make myself really useful."

"In what way?" This time Edith spoke with quicker energy.

"Collecting bric-à-brac."

"Oh!"

"And pictures — encouraging native art. Don't you think I'm improving?"

"Not enough," she replied frankly. "You ought to give up disparaging your good impulses. It's a great mistake, that mocking tone of yours."

"Yes, I suppose I'm enough of a mockery in myself, without that. But, really, I must try to be useful in the only ways that are open to me. My aunt's will has given me money enough, you know; and I want to help along the artists a little."

"But you might do more."

"Do you think so? Ah, if I only had the opportunity to try!" His tone was sincere enough now. She knew — how could she help knowing? — that he was thinking of her. There was an instant during which their minds dwelt on the same point and the same memory, though neither wished just then to have them referred to. He continued in a more apathetic way: "But there is nothing open to me; and if I were to set up an aim, the world would gently ignore it. The world is so friendly and pleasant to me that I can't make 'a good square issue' with it. I'm not a hero, nor a great lawyer, nor a man that must struggle, nor a merchant or artist: I'm simply at ease, with a fair share of cultivation. If I should declare to-morrow, 'I'm going to be great!' my friends would answer, 'Oh, come, my boy, have a glass of champagne, and let's hear about that some other time.' No; if I ever occupy a 'position,' it will only be by force of survival. I shall be this or that because I can't help myself. My misfortune is

that I should like to do something more than stop a gap in society ; but Nature has decreed that I'm to be only the stop-gap."

They talked on for a time, the certainty deepening all the while with Ravling that he had been right, long ago, in telling Edith that she was his one aim, and that without her he could do nothing. It seemed so easy to speak again ; here they were together, alone, with so little atmospheric space between them — what should prevent his claiming her and drawing her to his side forever ? But he did not speak ; he did not dare to.

In a few minutes he had left her and gone his way again, hoping he should be braver another time.

Edith stood between the pale brown folds of Madras muslin at the window, looking out into the Public Garden, and thinking of the day when Ravling had offered himself to her among the Marle pines. She had wondered then if she was making a mistake, and she wondered now. It seemed to her impossible that she could ever love any man but Burlen ; all her devotion had gone into the bond with him ; she felt herself consecrated to him, though they were never to be united ; and yet . . . "Certainties and uncertainties — what are they ?" She caught herself repeating those words of Burlen's writing. Ravling could offer her, if she encouraged him, all that she had once thought would fulfil her dreams, — wealth, manliness, a place in Boston which she might easily make that of a "leader." Would it not be better to accept him, and then ? —

A mental picture rose before her : the mountain-country, the deep snow, the straggling houses with their meagre life, and Burlen pushing through the howling blast on some humble, prosaic errand of mercy or pastoral business. It was many days since she had heard from him. By the way, it had begun to snow ; she saw the park whitening, from the window. Then, as if blown along with the storm, the peremptory figure of a letter-carrier came into view, and ascended the steps of the house with a white envelope in his hand. The bell rang ; the letter came in to Edith like a flake from the white shower without. It was postmarked "Savage's Mills," but addressed in a cramped, school-girlish hand. When Edith opened it she read : —

"DEAR FRIEND, MISS ARCHDALE, — My brother is very sick. He has typhoid fever. The doctor says he thinks he will not live, and I want to let you know this, because you are his only friend.

"THYRSA BURLEN."

XXX.

THE RAINBOW.

"HIS only friend!"

A sharp detonation seemed to Edith to split the air, when the sense of Thyrsa's few lines had entered her mind. The shock was followed by a ringing silence, amid which the words were re-echoed — "His only friend." "And I am here, idling, doing nothing for him, thinking of myself — brooding about Ravling, even — while that noble creature lies dying." This was the reproach she brought against herself.

When Viola returned from the afternoon concert to which she had been listening in rapt ecstasy with Mr. Bland, Edith met her as if preparing to go out, — dressed in a dark travelling costume, her face white and ghostly, looking as Viola had never seen it look until now. "Oh, Edith, dear!" she cried. "What has come over you? Are you ill?"

"No. *He!* —" The poor child was gasping. She raised her arm and pointed vaguely away, as if to indicate some spectral presence in the room; but Viola's mind was quick to leap beyond that narrow bound, and she saw far away, whither her friend's hand was directed, the lonely mountain in New

Hampshire. "He is dying," Edith said, almost inaudibly.

"Burlen? How? Are you sure?" asked Viola, rapidly. "But you — what are you going to do? You are not fit to go out, Edith."

"I am going up there to see him."

"In this storm? It's impossible. And alone, dear?"

"Oh, don't speak to me! don't say so! I shall never see him again if I don't go now. I don't care what people say — I don't care for anything, except to go."

"Is there a train to-night?" Viola inquired.

"Yes."

"Then I shall go with you. Only wait for me to get my things."

They waited for one other detail: they clasped each other close, and Edith broke into weeping. Her friend had never seen her shed a tear before that; but the two were alike now, — the sentimental and the proud, queenly-minded girl: the superficial friendship which they had hitherto so devoutly kept up deepened at once into a vital bond of heart-felt sympathy.

Two graceful feminine figures, fair and engaging even when shrouded in all their wraps, and inwardly miserable though they were, — packed into the red-velvet cushions of a long, over-heated car, they were carried steadily northward by the train that burrowed like a mole through the dark of night and storm; past the weary lights of deserted stations, and over

the harsh wilds of a black landscape fast smothering itself in white drift. It was midnight when they stopped at last and emerged into the cold, snow-choked silence of Savage's; and as they stood shivering on the platform, they could have believed that the whole village had been stricken with sudden death.

Burlen did not know who was near him. Lost in the weird labyrinths of fever, he thought himself surrounded by shapes and scenes of his troubled boyhood. Forms of the dead and faces of the unborn, the unimagined, mingled in a great silent drama that arose flickering before him, insubstantial, exaggerated, like the images projected from a lantern; and sometimes he saw his own figure there, dilating or shrinking in a dizzying manner, driven to and fro by uncontrollable blasts. He pitied the poor dumb shadow, and wondered why it vexed itself with such vast yearnings as seemed to be expressed in its unhappy features. Then some one who could explain it all seemed to be standing at his side, and he tried to ask: "Who is it that is making such ghastly sport of me with those phantoms?" But there was no reply, and he fancied he heard retreating footsteps and a smothered laugh. "God has forsaken me!" he moaned.

People he had never seen before conversed with him in unknown languages, but he understood them: they gathered into an audience; he poured out eloquence which, an instant afterward, he could not

remember; and always in these strange tongues. But presently common human speech returned, and he was conscious that he had asked for water, and knew that it was brought to him, — but only one sparkling drop, it seemed, which was lost in the hot whirl or dead, sullen mist of heat that was consuming him.

Presently he began to look through the eddying phantasmagoria that encompassed him, and saw flowered, sunshiny meadows beyond, and light groves of budding trees. He heard the bluebird singing, — a quick, cold ripple of music that ceased in an instant and was lost, apparently forever. There was a gurgling brook in the fields, that fell into a pool; but just as he was about to plunge into it and bathe, he saw lying under the water the white, placid, glinting form of a dead man, quiet and beautiful as some pearly sea-shell. "I will not disturb him," he thought, and went away. . . . He was in the slums searching for some one; there was coarse yellow gas-light, there were drinking and laughter. . . . The yellow light faded; the rocky crown of Monadnoc lifted him up into pure air. But, looking over the side, he saw his sister clinging there and about to fall. He leaned over; she caught hold of him, and he slipped. Launched into space, he fell and kept falling; for the earth opened and soon dissolved, hanging above him as a mist. He was falling through the nethermost depths of the universe, amid dense night filled with white stars and snow showers. There was a roar of wind and storm; . . . then the whole show of things that had been circling around him

came to a pause abruptly. He looked straight forward and saw the ceiling of his room; he turned a little, sideward, and faced two sweet, anxious, patient eyes.

"What is it? Where have we been, Edith?" he asked feebly.

When he grew better he learned that Archdale had come to watch with his daughter, after Viola was obliged to return to Boston; and that both the father and the daughter were assisting Thyrsa. There was an intimation, a presentiment of spring in the air, — that mysterious balminess which seems to be charged with the delicate scent of wild-flowers before ever a blossom has sprung from the ground; and there came to the invalid a corresponding sense that he should soon quite recover. The doctor, in fine, had been mistaken. Edith forgave the mistake.

Burlen's convalescence was slow; but his three companions watched him carefully, and there was no relapse. Finally, when the snow had retreated to its last hold in the deep woods and sheltered hollows, he went out to walk in the sunny hours, with Edith. They were alone, Archdale's conception of fitness being unlike that of his more punctilious sister.

"How beautiful it is!" said the young minister, when they had reached the limit of their walk and were about to turn. "I had almost forgotten that the world could look so bright. And it helps me so to have you here. When" — he hesitated — "when are you going away?" In his weakness,

though he strove to appear self-possessed, there was a touch of the child who dreads to be left alone.

"I'm not going until you feel that you don't need me," said Edith.

It was with a mixture of sadness and delight in his look that he answered: "I shall always need you. Would you be willing to stay?" he added timidly. "Do you think you could renew our engagement after my foolishness and conceit in withdrawing from it?"

Her face, though she did not at once turn it towards him, answered before her voice. "I have been yours," she said, with the sweet composure which had always so potently impressed him in her, "since that day when I promised first. And I don't think you were foolish or conceited. It was brave to try that renunciation, and we shall understand and love each other all the better for it."

"I imagined myself so strong —" he began.

"And you are," insisted she; "but you needed some weakness to make you complete, and I can supply it. Isn't that it?"

He laughed a little. "The case seems to be just the reverse at present," he said. "I could n't have contrived a better way to get you back, if I had been in a story. But I know what would have happened if I had *not* had the fever. I should have gone to you, instead of your coming to me."

They were not married until June; and then the wedding took place from Archdale's old gambrel-

roofed house at Marle, much to the distress of several undergraduates, who had improved the last opportunity to fall in love with Edith before her departure to the humbler scene of Savage's. Mrs. Savland fulfilled her part in the affair with excellent judgment, carefully incorporating with the ceremony a few judicious tears, which were followed by smiles at the breakfast. What gave Edith and her husband a keener satisfaction was the enthusiasm of a committee from Burlen's congregation, who attended the wedding, and afterwards modestly drew their pastor aside to assure him that he must take a three months' vacation, during which they would provide for him as usual.

We must leave them at the beginning of the journey, which both symbolizes and inaugurates the journey through life. There is much in store for them,—much suffering as well as pleasure. The thing which seems to me fine about it is not the amount of enjoyment they are likely to have, but the fact that here are two fresh and genuine hearts going forth into the world with the hope of making it better and gladder for a time. Even in an age when enthusiasm is marked "curious" by the sophisticated collector, and when fiction, to get itself called intellectual, ends fashionably in dilettante fatalism, one may profitably descend for a moment to contemplate these happy young people, setting out full of belief and beneficence.

The goal which had seemed to Burlen so remote a year before at the Cleft was gained, and he stood

between two distances, — one into which his past misfortunes had faded ; another spreading out as far as he could see in advance, a rich summer of anticipation.


“ You know,” he said, as they travelled away, “ how I thought one could never be certain of any ideal thing? I’ve changed my mind now, for I’m touching the rainbow, and know it.”



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